



GO WITH THE FLOE: GEOSTRATEGIC RAMIFICATIONS OF A
CHANGING ARCTIC

by

MAJOR KIT CONN, USAF

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APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis meets masters-level standards of research, argumentation, and expression.

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DISCLAIMER

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the US Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, or Air University.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major Kit Conn was born on a surplus WWII rocket boat in a floating, post-hippie collective community on the San Francisco Bay. A graduate of The University of California at Davis, he earned his commission through ROTC in June of 2001. Upon graduation from pilot training in 2002, he went on to fly the C-5 Galaxy and C-17 Globemaster III. He flew extensively in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, from 2003-2012.



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I dedicate this work to the imagined memory of Kilgore Trout. He crossed Sugar Creek for our amusement.



ABSTRACT

The purpose of this work is to analyze some current geopolitical issues in the Arctic region through a specific lens. Focusing on the importance of sea lines of communication and their geostrategic relevance, this paper explores how the Arctic in 2014 offers new trade routes and geopolitical options. The author analyzes the reasons why the Panama Canal project turned out so favorably for the United States, while the 1956 Suez War was disastrous for the British, and seeks to apply takeaways from those two phenomena toward the Arctic in 2014. First, the author explores some current geopolitical issues in the Arctic region, with specific regard to American, Canadian, Russian, and Chinese interests. Next, he undertakes a historical study of America's role in the building and administration of the Panama Canal. Following that, the writer addresses Great Britain's winning war against Nasser's Egypt in 1956, which ended up costing Great Britain control of the canal. Through those studies, he stipulates how the United States successfully used its diplomatic instrument of power in Central America, while Great Britain over-relied on its military might to the detriment of her political efforts, subsequently fighting a winning war which could not deliver the ends London sought. Finally, the author calls on contemporary materials and analysis to make recommendations for American and Canadian policy efforts in the Arctic, as well as advocating further study.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Go With the Floe

Kilgore Trout once wrote a short story which was a dialogue between two pieces of yeast. They were discussing the possible purposes of life as they ate sugar and suffocated in their own excrement. Because of their limited intelligence, they never came close to guessing that they were making champagne.

- Kurt Vonnegut, *Breakfast of Champions*

Changes in the polar region are challenging the geostrategic status quo. Where permanent ice had made much of the Arctic region impassible throughout modern human history, new sea lines of communication are now opening. Where once sat impediments to shipping and mineral extraction, now the promise of navigational shortcuts and petrochemical wealth beckons.¹ With commercial expansion into the Arctic, national fortunes will arise from ease of access to the region. Accordingly, national interests will orient northward and some players in the geopolitical game will gain at the expense of others. Realpolitik will dictate action to challenge or maintain the status quo as players see fit.² An accessible Arctic will not represent the first instance of redesigned lines of communication challenging the international status quo. Similar to the new Arctic, in the past, Panama and Egypt offered new shipping lanes that allowed great powers an opportunity to do business in a new way. This paper's purpose is to reflect on the two man-made canals' effects on regional and global power structures and apply salient experiences on how the Arctic will offer analogous opportunities, pitfalls, and lessons learned. Antoine Bousquet observed how "local causes can have global effects."³ His research addressing the

¹ Hannes Gerhardt, et al. "Contested Sovereignty in a Changing Arctic." *Annals Of The Association Of American Geographers* 100, no. 4 (October 2010): 993.

² D. Deudney's definitions of political phenomena, as quoted by Everett C. Dolman, *Astropolitik: Classical Geopolitics in the Space Age* (New York, NY: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002), 12.

³ Antoine Bousquet, *The Scientific Way of Warfare: Order and Chaos on the Battlefields of Modernity* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2009), 197.

way states pursue policies intended to minimize uncertainty is applicable whenever one seeks to explain the way players chase their geostrategic interests. Today, a host of interests is in play in the melting Arctic and this paper will explore the potential actions of world actors as they seek those interests.

The Arctic region hosts vital American, Canadian, Russian, and Chinese interests, as well as those of several European states. In this paper, I am limiting the scope of analysis to great powers because their interactions will have further reaching ramifications than those of minor players. It is worth noting that Norway, through its membership in NATO, extensive petrochemical resources in the Arctic, and shared border with Russia, is an important player in the geostrategic situation in the region. Similarly, NATO member Denmark administers Greenland and accordingly retains access to the Arctic. Both of those Scandinavian states hold vital interests in the Arctic and are pursuing policy reflective of that fact. However, the bulk of the analysis in this paper will focus on the aforementioned states while only granting limited reflection on Norway and Denmark.

By understanding some variables that might shape disparate national agendas, America can prepare to address the vicissitudes of interacting in a redefined geographic realm. If American decision makers avoid miscues that manifested in Suez while repeating the successful actions in Panama, our country will be in a better position to exploit the political aspects of a new geopolitical landscape atop the globe.

Robert Jervis called on Stanley Hoffman's observation that "Americans tend to use history as a 'grabbag from which each advocate pulls out a 'lesson' to prove his point.'" ⁴ While there is a danger in oversimplifying the past and erroneously creating a misguided heuristic when transposing past events to present or future likelihoods, there is

⁴ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 217.

equal or greater danger in failing to try learn from the past.⁵ Yuen Foong Khong's views on the value of developing an applicable and well-referenced schema should inform anyone seeking "to detect patterns and causal links that can help him understand his world."⁶ In the spirit of Jervis and Khong, I will endeavor to do that in this thesis. Mark Trachtenberg observed that history, like science, "often deals with the vestiges of past phenomena."⁷ Per his remarks, I will also aim to treat the data in an objective and rigorous manner.

Conceptual Thought

Since the advent of civilization, the flow of commerce has dominated and shaped the societal narrative. Just as land armies have seized territory for the purposes of national expansion and identity since time immemorial, so too has access to the surface of the world's waterways been a requirement for any non-autarky. Accordingly, "the tendency to trade...is the national characteristic most important to the development of sea power."⁸ The common thread in this concept of *access to movement* is the requirement for freedom from impediment in the form of a hostile rival's actions. Without a land force to establish a government's territorial legitimacy, a polity is not free to pursue any policy. Similarly, a permissive navigational environment requires some measure of sea power, or at least the absence of an active enemy menace on the water. Whether a strong fleet, a friendly benefactor, or a common agreement remedies this problem, is irrelevant to this paper's scope. The assumption stands: without access to its own territory or lines of

⁵ Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 31-35.

⁶ Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War*, 28-30 and Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 217.

⁷ Mark Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History: A Guide to Method* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 14-15.

⁸ Captain A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History 1660-1783* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1987), 53.

communication over the water, a state's options are critically limited. Mahan postulated the ramifications such a loss of freedom of the seas would inflict on the United States. To point, he noted: "Will there be no money loss, no suffering, consequent upon this?" He continued, "The people of the United States certainly will not starve, but they may suffer grievously."⁹ Accordingly, freedom of movement is a vital interest for any state that is not an autarky. Since shorter distances of travel between two points can increase the efficiency of movement, as direct a path across the ocean's surface as possible makes the most sense for any state seeking transportation. Accordingly, a state achieves the greatest benefit in terms of securing options by creating, maintaining, or gaining access to the most efficient route of travel.

Starting from that assumption, the historical record informs the importance of access to the sea and the energy great powers have expended in maintaining that access. The Suez Canal and the Panama Canal are demonstrative historical cases of that perceived importance. Arnold Wilson commented, "Both are classic examples of engineering works which have altered the course of history as well as of trade."¹⁰ In both cases, great powers relied on military and diplomatic power to press their advantage over rivals. If force of arms is the most obvious (if not the cheapest) method of securing access to the sea, then it stands to reason that war for access to sea lines of communication is a natural extension of policy designed to maintain access. In one of the historical cases used in this paper, that is explicitly what happened. A Franco-British-Israeli coalition warred with Egypt for control over a navigable stretch of the Egyptian desert.

Conversely, American diplomacy backed by military and economic might was the chief agent in the creation and administration of the Panama Canal. Since war is expensive in all senses (though it has also

⁹ Captain A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, 86.

¹⁰ Sir Arnold Wilson, MP, "The Suez Canal," *International Affairs* 18, no. 3 (May - Jun., 1939): 380.

proven profitable, particularly in the era when wars of conquest were more common and accepted within the realm of normal international relations), it is reasonable that states have sought non-lethal means of securing their interests regarding navigable access. The other in this paper is such an example; one of non-military means as a method to gain access to a sea line of communication. The state of Panama itself and its eponymous canal are results of American diplomatic energy used to ensure America's right to unfettered navigation between the world's two largest oceans. Unlike Great Britain's ultimately unsuccessful Suez war of 1956, America's experience in Panama achieved American foreign policy aims.

Panama and Suez proved the high level of importance great powers of the time placed on guaranteeing their own ability to dictate the terms of navigational access. As the Arctic opens, national aims will be no different. The players will be different and the methods of using instruments of power may not mirror their use in Panama and Suez. However, the top of the world will almost certainly become a theater of competition if human interaction continues as it has thus far. Analyzing past events and extrapolating their salient points is one way to nurture an advantage in whatever form the Arctic race takes.

Research Question

The purpose of this paper is to contrast previous instances of new lines of communication affecting the geopolitical status quo with current events in the opening Arctic. In this study, I will explore what made America's actions in the Panama Canal beneficial to American interests while analyzing how those actions prevented other players from similarly benefitting. I will use a similar method of analysis for Great Britain as it operated in the Suez Canal. By exploring those two examples' geopolitical effects, I will draw conclusions about what worked in the pursuit of national interests framed through the issue of access to a line

of communication. I will use those findings to hypothesize which courses of action might bear the most fruit in an Arctic policy.

Admittedly, this paper will reflect present day American interests in the Arctic foremost. I will, however, present a brief survey of some issues relevant to other actors who are central to current Arctic politics. Particularly, I will analyze Canada's treatment of the status of the Northwest Passage and Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic. I will also explore matters of Russian sabre rattling and Moscow's pursuit of resource extraction in the Arctic. Finally, I will analyze China's attempts at increasing Beijing's influence in the Arctic; for that topic, I will look at Chinese efforts at securing an economic foothold in Iceland.

The geopolitical landscapes of the early 20th century, the 1950s, and today are distinctive but each era holds substantial similarities. By seizing on the relevant issues in Panama and the Suez, I plan to compare the experiences with the modern day. Successfully accomplishing that will demystify the changing Arctic geopolitical landscape and better prepare further study of this critical American interest area.¹¹

Historiography, Methodology and Research Limitations

Geoffrey Parker's definition of *geopolitics* as "the study of states as spatial phenomena, with a view toward understanding the geographical bases of their power" informs this paper's treatment of the word.¹²

Parker's definition is apt for my treatment of the three cases I will address in this paper; in each case, a geographic feature is central to states employing their instruments of power in pursuit of the benefits they hope to reap via control of that geographic feature. The present conditions in the Arctic, with specific regard to the United States, Russia, China, and Canada, are a salient and emerging example of states refining

¹¹ The White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, May 2010), 50.

¹² Geoffrey Parker, *Western Geopolitical Thought in the Twentieth Century* (New York: St. Martin's, 1986), 1, as referenced in Everett C. Dolman, *Astropolitik*, 13.

their geopolitical agendas. The two historical accounts I will draw on were similarly couched within a regional context whereby states sought to maximize gains through exercising national instruments of power.

Methodologically, I will call upon archival analysis of what changed when various national efforts conceived and completed the Panama Canal. I will reference histories and contemporary commentaries that addressed the changes occurring because of the Panama Canal, focusing on legal aspects of ownership and possession of the Panama Canal Zone. Similarly, I will analyze historical views on the effects of the Suez Canal, focusing on how European powers levied their instruments of power in Egypt for exploiting access to that line of communication. In the Suez case, this paper will seek answers as to why Great Britain and France fought a winning war but lost their shared hold on the Suez Canal. Using contemporary and *ex post facto* analyses of the Suez Canal's conception, completion and the 1956 war that determined the present fate of the canal, this thesis will build on the established body of work for the purposes of transposing lessons learned onto today's situation in the Arctic.

For framing the situation in the Arctic as it stands today, I will use contemporary news analysis and internationally accepted definitions of access, ownership, and national interests as they pertain to the Arctic. In addition, I will reference academic treatments of the legal and political analyses of the current Arctic environment. My research will call upon the United Nations Command Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) for definitional and legal treatment of maritime access as it pertains to the Arctic. Inchoate international agreements, responsibilities, and territorial claims dominate contemporary analysis of the Arctic; the UNCLOS will aid in framing that aspect of this thesis. For the purposes of this paper, I will highlight some geopolitical topics that threaten to challenge the status quo for the United States, Canada, Russia, and China. Furthermore, I will briefly address Norwegian and Danish concerns as they relate to the

changing Arctic situation. Those two European states have valid concerns regarding matters of their own Arctic sovereignty and while I will not explore their causes in depth, they warrant mention, particularly given their ties to NATO.

Underlying the debates and assumptions about the Arctic is the suspicion that militarization follows commercial enterprise. That assumption engenders a tangential exploration of how Arctic-interested states might exercise their military instrument of power in the Arctic. While guesswork about which specific military steps each state in the Arctic will take in the Arctic is beyond this paper's scope, it deserves some treatment. To that end, I will reference and analyze the November 2013 Arctic Strategy of the US Department of Defense (DoD) and the US President's May 2013 National Strategy for the Arctic Region. Those two documents lend a direct line of scrutiny into America's stated aims and interests in the Arctic. If a conflict in the Arctic becomes likely in the near future, the topics I explore in this thesis will offer a functional starting point for more martially oriented analysis. Since the United States and Russia are the most visible and vocal power players in today's Arctic (owing to the size of their economies and their nuclear statuses), my research will lend particular attention to American and Russian interests as they pertain to military matters.

By contrasting past events' effects on geopolitical machinations in Panama and Egypt, I will identify salient issues for further contemplation. Along the way, I intend to draw lessons that bring bright-line conclusions about cause and effect regarding exercising power in pursuit of maximizing national gains in regions of transition. A relevant assumption for this argument's starting point is that American diplomatic strength was successful in Panama, while British military power was unsuccessful in the 1956 Suez War. Since each case includes a situation whereby a previously non-existent sea line of communication came into being and affected national fortunes, the parallels between

each example will not be esoteric or overly tenuous. Although the Suez Canal was not new at the time of the 1956 Suez War, its changing status affected the geostrategic situation well beyond the Canal's locale.

A limitation of my research is the paucity of historical treatment of the Arctic environment as it pertains to large-scale, globalized commercial and military activity. To overcome that limitation I will rely on contemporary analysis of the Arctic and its place in present geopolitical machinations. A potential problem with that method is the preponderance of ongoing and tentative studies of the Arctic's political environment. The body of Arctic scholarship is growing, and although much of it is speculative, I aim to add to the academic conversation.

Summary

By constructing a geostrategic policy that pursues the maximum advantage for the United States in a coherent and achievable manner, American interests can advance in the changing Arctic. With a shortcut opening at the top of the world, commerce and properly directed national energies will exploit this new advantage in transportation. If states can bolster a trade advantage by a shortened route across the sea, it is reasonable to aver that they will. The opening Arctic shares many similarities with Panama and Suez, and all three cases offer clues regarding how states work to maximize their interests. Practitioners of strategic thought would do well to recognize how a change in climate can engender drastic changes in fortune with regard to military affairs.¹³ America is not the only state seeking advantage by proclaiming the Arctic as a vital interest. History holds lessons for the way in which states have sought strategic aims regarding new waterways.

¹³ Recent research shows the importance climate played in ancient armies' movement. Genghis Kahn and his offspring conquered most of the Eurasian landmass thanks in part to a change in climate. See Sarah Zielinski, "Warm, Wet Times Spurred Medieval Mongol Rise" *Smithsonian*, 10 March 2014. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/warm-wet-times-spurred-medieval-mongol-rise-180950030/?no-ist> accessed 10 March 2014.

In this thesis, I will not assert that history is repeating itself. Doing so would conflict with the warnings Khong and Jervis so eloquently promulgated. However, we in the profession of arms would be remiss by ignoring the very real consequences that befell great powers as they navigated changing access in the Panama and Suez Canals. We should strive to comprehend the nature and character of war so we might understand “how actors prepare for hostilities,” preventing conflicts when possible and winning them when unavoidable.¹⁴ The Arctic need not be a mysterious nor contentious stage on which newly emerging interests are manifesting themselves. Through objective analysis of some of the world’s power players in today’s Arctic, it is possible to extrapolate useful lessons from past cases of geostrategic machinations for access and resources. The proper mix of diplomatic and military maneuvering will be necessary for any state seeking to maximize its benefit by operating in the Arctic. The alternatives to formulating a working understanding of what happened in the past and what is possible in the present is simply to avoid analysis of the issue or misunderstand it. Both are imprudent. My exploration of this issue begins with a treatment of some current issues affecting geopolitical changes in the Arctic.

Heraclitus wrote, “You cannot step twice into the same river,” since change is a constant.¹⁵ However, while the waterway one seeks to cross may change, it is a worthwhile endeavor to remember one’s past crossings to utilize the lessons learned from them. A study of present Arctic issues can benefit from keeping in mind Heraclitus’s quote.

¹⁴ David J. Lonsdale, *The Nature of War in the Information Age* (New York: Frank Cass, 2004), 22.

¹⁵ William Harris, Heraclitus, *The Complete Fragments. Translation and Commentary and The Greek text* (Middlebury, VT: Middlebury College, no date given), 11.

Chapter 2

The Arctic in 2014: Frozen Sea Change

The United States is an Arctic Nation with broad and fundamental interests in the Arctic region, where we seek to meet our national security needs, protect the environment, responsibly manage resources, account for indigenous communities, support scientific research, and strengthen international cooperation on a wide range of issues.

-2010 National Security Strategy

Walter McDougall asked: “how to manage the use of nonterritorial regions like sea, air, Antarctica, or outer space, within the system of sovereign, territorial states?”¹ When one looks toward the Arctic, the answer will almost certainly depend on which sovereign state one asks. For the purpose of this thesis, I will focus on the relevant interests of the United States, Russia, Canada, and China. Furthermore, I will explore salient issues of contention among those states as related to their stated Arctic policies. Those four states have the most widely promulgated geopolitical interests, which most directly shape the geostrategic situation in the Arctic. Three of the four are nuclear powers and each identifies itself as a stakeholder in Arctic affairs. Additionally, Denmark and Norway are major players in the geopolitics of the Arctic, by any estimation. Norway’s sizeable petrochemical reserves in the region and its shared border with Russia make Norway relevant in the Arctic conversation. Denmark administers Greenland which straddles the Northwest Passage and the Greenland Sea, holding position in the midst of strategically critical lines of communication. However, this paper’s scope centers on the United States, Russia, Canada, and China because those states represent a preponderance of world trade and form the hard

¹ Walter A. McDougal, ...*the Heavens and the Earth: A Political History of the Space Age* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 177.

core of nuclear armed states.² Anyone seeking to guide US policy regarding the region will be in a better position to do so by achieving a foundational understanding of political and strategic motivations in the Arctic. In the following pages, I aim to do just that.

In relating to a transforming geostrategic landscape atop the world, today's global powers are in a position to benefit from new lines of communication and access to petrochemical wealth. Conversely, they risk provoking conflict and hampering economic growth if they pursue their interests in an unconsidered manner.

Petrochemical Riches and Nautical Shortcuts - The Current State of Arctic Affairs

The permanent ice in the Arctic Ocean is shrinking. The reasons behind the climate change affecting the rise in global temperatures are beyond the scope of this paper. However, the American strategic dialogue will suffer if military thinkers ignore the reality of global warming and its consequences on the geostrategic situation in the Arctic. Not only does American territory reach into the Arctic Circle, but also abuts Russian territory across the narrow Bering Strait. That navigational chokepoint will play an increasingly important role in global shipping as year-round traffic increases due to a less ice-bound Arctic Ocean. Increased shipping activity, expanded resource extraction operations, and the promise of wealth flowing from the Arctic will each play a part in spurring states to act in the region. If it is true that "The mainstay of the economy of the Arctic is transport," then it stands to reason that states seeking to exploit the Arctic for purposes of profit will focus on freedom of movement in the region.³

² Because Canada falls under America's nuclear umbrella, I will consider Canada as the equivalent of a nuclear power even though Canada does not possess nuclear arms. NORAD is the best manifestation of Canada's status as the equivalent of a nuclear power for deterrence purposes.

³ Terrence Armstrong, *The Russians in the Arctic* (Fair Lawn, NJ: Essential Books, 1958), 164.

A New York Times article from 2005 captured a convincing reason for the increasing level of interest in the Arctic: “All told, one quarter of the world's undiscovered oil and gas resources lies in the Arctic, according to the United States Geological Survey.”⁴ Five years after the Times article, the numbers remained mostly unchanged, estimating 13% of the earth’s oil and 30% of its natural gas reserves in the Arctic.⁵ If for no other reason than the promise of petrochemical wealth, it is understandable that China, Russia, the US, and Canada all see the Arctic as central to their interests. American policymakers are aware of this fact. In 2009, the White House released National Security Presidential Directive 66, which states, “Human activity in the Arctic region is increasing and is projected to increase further in coming years. This requires the United States to assert a more active and influential national presence to protect its Arctic interests and to project sea power throughout the region.”⁶ Like the United States, Canada and Russia are similarly reaffirming their commitments to Arctic policy. Although not a member of the Arctic Council nor an Arctic state, China has made clear its interest in the Arctic as well.

⁴ Clifford Krauss, et. al, “As Polar Ice Turns to Water, Dreams of Treasure Abound.” *The New York Times*, 10 October 2005.

⁵ Donald L. Gautier and Timothy R. Klett, “U.S. Geological Survey Oil and Gas Resource Assessment of the Russian Arctic,” (Reston, VA: USGS, July 2010), 13.

⁶ The White House, “National Security Presidential Directive and Homeland Security Presidential Directive-66, Arctic Region Policy,” 12 January 2009.

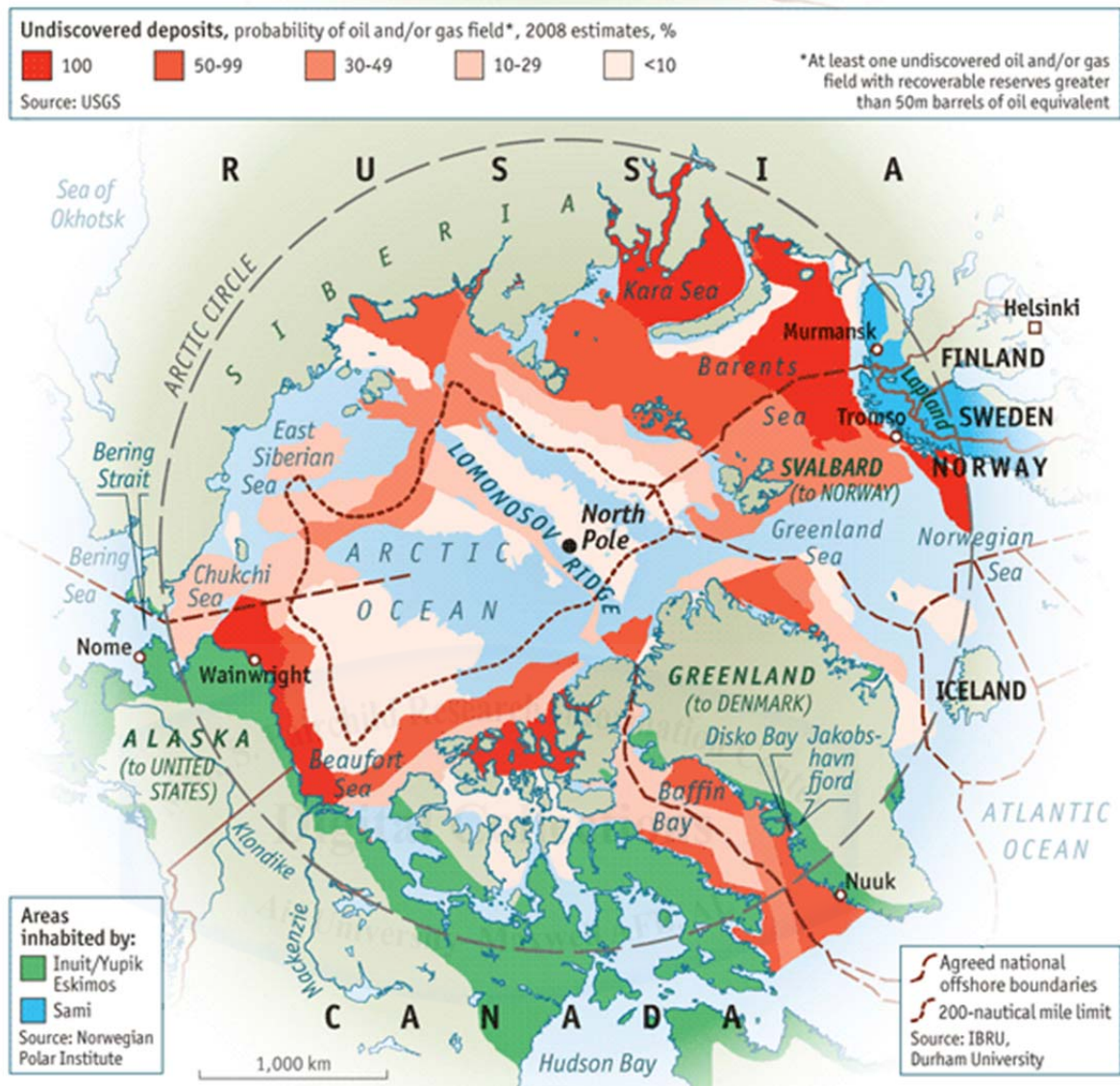


Figure 1: Undiscovered Deposits

Source: *The Economist*, used with permission

Compound the expected oil riches with the substantial shipping shortcuts atop the globe and the geostrategic relevance of the Arctic becomes even clearer. Indeed, results of a 2009 study “suggest that a 10% decrease in ocean distance results in a 5% increase in trade.”⁷ When considering the distances a shipping company can save by routing shipping through the Arctic (up to five days shorter and \$80,000 in fuel

⁷ James Feyrer, “The 1967-75 Suez Canal closure: Lessons for trade and the trade-income link.” *Vox*, 23 December 2009. Cited in *The Economist*, “A Plan, A Canal,” 23 December 2009.

savings), the commercial impetus to secure access to the region is clear.⁸ To point, “With the anticipated melting in the Arctic, many world powers are jockeying for control of the formerly dormant region to exploit its rich natural resources. Access to navigational rights would cut short the current trading routes between East Asia and Europe through the Panama Canal by thousands of miles.”⁹ A 2010 study quantified that assertion:

Increased melting of Arctic sea ice may lead to a longer navigation season, improved accessibility for shipping, and extended use of the shipping routes along the margins of the Arctic basin (the Northern Sea Route, NSR, and the Northwest Passage, NWP). Travel distance between Europe and the North Pacific Region can be reduced by more than 40% compared with current sea routes by using the NSR, and by even more if sailing directly across the North Pole becomes possible.¹⁰

Estimates in 2014 expect that “Over the next decade investments in excess of 30 billion Euros will commence in the European High North and adjoining regions of Russia, with the largest projects associated with the offshore oil and gas industry.”¹¹ The race for the Arctic is on. One problem is that the rules covering sovereignty are unclear.

⁸ Katrine Grønvald Raun “Nordic Bulk Carriers save USD 80,000 on Arctic route” *ShippingWatch*, 23 September 13. www.shippingwatch.com

⁹ Geo-Strategy Direct, “China gaining foothold in Arctic by leasing large land area from Iceland.” *International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center*. 16 May 2012: 9.

¹⁰ DNV (Det Norske Veritas) Research and Innovation, Position Paper 04 - 2010, “Shipping across the Arctic Ocean: A feasible option in 2030-2050 as a result of global warming?” 4.

¹¹ Ebinger et. al., “Offshore Oil and Gas Governance in the Arctic, A Leadership Role for the U.S.,” *Brookings Institute Policy Brief*, March 2014, 7.

Table 1: Selected comparisons of shipping distances

	Vancouver, Canada to Rotterdam, Netherlands	Shanghai, China to Rotterdam, Netherlands	Yokohama, Japan to Rotterdam, Netherlands
Via Panama Canal	10,262 NM	X	X
Via Suez Canal	X	12,107 NM	12,894 NM
Via Arctic Route (Northwest Passage or Northern Route)	8,038 NM	9,297 NM	8,452 NM

Source: Data from New York Times, 11 September 2009.

Salient to the themes of Arctic exploration, legal status of territory, and exploitation of mineral wealth, is the UNCLOS. The UNCLOS defines territorial rights as well as norms of shipping and passage for signatory states. America is alone among the eight members of the Arctic Council (the US, Canada, Iceland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, and the Russian Federation¹²) in that it is a non-signatory to the UNCLOS.¹³ Notably, China is a signatory to the UNCLOS. Through the machinations of the Arctic Council, the United Nations, as well as other multilateral and bilateral negotiations, Arctic interested states are attempting to interpret one another's rights and claims as compared with their own. In the following sections, I will explore a small menu of issues relevant to the United States, Canada, Russia and China.

America's Arctic Interests

In November 2013, US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel signed The DoD Arctic Strategy. In 14 pages, the document outlines America's stance regarding defense-related activity in the Arctic. It complements

¹² The Arctic Council, <http://www.Arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about-us/member-states> Accessed 3 Apr 14.

¹³ United Nations, Oceans and Law of the Sea; Division for Ocean Affairs and Law of the Sea, http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/convention_declarations.htm accessed 3 Mar 14.

the President's May 2013 National Strategy for the Arctic Region. The DoD Arctic Strategy aims toward "a secure and stable region where U.S. national interests are safeguarded, the U.S. homeland is protected, and nations work cooperatively to address challenges."¹⁴ Similarly, the President's National Strategy for the Arctic Region states:

We seek an Arctic region that is stable and free of conflict, where nations act responsibly in a spirit of trust and cooperation, and where economic and energy resources are developed in a sustainable manner that also respects the fragile environment and the interests and cultures of indigenous peoples.¹⁵

Those two documents' statements are bold and general. It should surprise no one that American decision makers portend to "[operate] in conjunction with other States when possible and independently if necessary—in order to maintain stability in the region."¹⁶ Still, that proclamation sets a lofty standard toward which American policy in the Arctic aims. The President's document puts forth a similarly optimistic and cooperative tone by announcing America's intent to "Seek to maintain and preserve the Arctic region as an area free of conflict, acting in concert with allies, partners, and other interested parties."¹⁷ One specific area of interest whereby the US is operating outside an area of trust and cooperation with other states is American reluctance to ratify the UNCLOS.

American Resistance to the UNCLOS

Recognizing the desirability of establishing through this Convention, with due regard for the sovereignty of all States, a legal order for the seas and oceans which will facilitate international communication, and will promote the peaceful uses of the seas and oceans, the equitable and efficient

¹⁴ The Pentagon, "Arctic Strategy," 2.

¹⁵ The White House, "National Strategy for the Arctic Region," 4.

¹⁶ The Pentagon, "Arctic Strategy," 6.

¹⁷ The White House, "National Strategy for the Arctic Region," 2.

utilization of their resources, the conservation of their living resources, and the study, protection and preservation of the marine environment,

-UNCLOS, preamble

The United States' contributions to drafting the UNCLOS were substantial. That is ironic given Washington's unwillingness to sign the document.¹⁸ In spite of the American Petroleum Institute and various Presidential administrations of both parties supporting ratification of the UNCLOS, it remains perennially blocked by partisan members of Congress.¹⁹

One rationale behind refusing to ratify the UNCLOS revolves around the fear of a loss of American sovereignty in matters regarding navigation and mineral extraction.²⁰ In his 2006 piece for Foreign Policy Analysis, David A. Ridenour opined, "the Law of the Sea Treaty would impede the U.S.'s ability to capture international terrorists and confiscate weapons of mass destruction through detention of ships on the high seas."²¹ He qualified his position by asserting that the provisions within the UNCLOS do not allow for a liberal enough interpretation of when a state may detain a ship traversing its waters. Even if ratification of the UNCLOS did not threaten American interests on the seas, American political bodies have an established record of abstaining from entering into international agreements. An observer need only look to nuclear test ban treaties and the Kyoto Protocols to find examples of Washington's obstinacy when faced with international agreements that may limit American options. Still, America cannot escape its responsibilities in the Arctic for several reasons. Accordingly,

¹⁸ Mark Jarashow, et al. "UNCLOS and the Arctic: The Path of Least Resistance," *Fordham International Law Journal* 30, no. 5 (2006), 1641.

¹⁹ Mark Jarashow, et al. "UNCLOS and the Arctic," 1642.

²⁰ David A. Ridenour, "Ratification of the Law of the Sea Treaty: A Not-So-Innocent Passage," *National Policy Analysis*, no. 542 (August, 2006).

²¹ David A. Ridenour, "Ratification of the Law of the Sea Treaty: A Not-So-Innocent Passage."

American policy must reflect the immediacy of the issues brought by the changing Arctic. Doing so outside of the conventions of international law complicates America's ability to operate with maximum diplomatic efficacy in the Arctic.

As evidenced by the state of Alaska's location within the Arctic, America is an Arctic-interested nation state of the first order. Furthermore, American reliance on freedom of sea navigation for commercial purposes will not decrease with increased international shipping activity in the Arctic. In his report for Congress, Ronald O'Rourke specifically addressed issues relevant to America's national security in the Arctic. He specified various methods available to safeguard access to the Arctic, including:

The United States needs assured Arctic access to support national interests in the Arctic. This access can be provided by a variety of proven capabilities, including submarines and aircraft, but only U.S.-flagged ice-capable ships provide visible U.S. sovereign maritime presence throughout the Arctic region. This need could potentially be met by either icebreakers or ice strengthened surface vessels, none of which are in the U.S. Navy current surface combatant inventory, but which do exist in U.S. Coast Guard's inventory in limited numbers...²²

The changing character of the Arctic is not lost on America's top ranking sailor. Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Jonathan Greenert observed, "In our lifetime, what was [in effect] land and prohibitive to navigate or explore, is becoming an ocean, and we'd better understand it... [w]e need to be sure that our sensors, weapons and people are proficient in this part of the world," in order to "own the undersea domain and get anywhere there."²³

²² Ronald O'Rourke, "Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress," *Congressional Research Service* (Washington DC), 28 Apr 14, 66.

²³ Thomas L. Friedman, "Parallel Parking in the Arctic," *The New York Times*, 29 March 2014.

America's claims to natural resources in the Arctic are a central tenet of the President's 2013 Arctic Strategy. Mindful of the fragile and changing nature of the Arctic, the President's plan recognizes how "An undisciplined approach to exploring new opportunities in this frontier could result in significant harm to the region, to our national security interests, and to the global good."²⁴ In light of the President's policy and the comments by the Chief of Naval Operations, it is clear that members within the highest levels of American bureaucracy recognize the need to orient Washington's attention northward. Both the 2013 Arctic Strategy and Admiral Greenert's comments reflect an understanding that without deliberate attention on the changing character of the Arctic, America's interests may fall prey to poor planning and the possible costs of failing to be proactive. If other states are designing their Arctic policies and martial skill sets to make those states more able to respond when opportunities arise, America will find itself playing catch up.

Canada's Arctic Interests

Coastal states may, in the exercise of their sovereignty within their territorial sea, adopt laws and regulations for the prevention, reduction, and control of marine pollution from foreign vessels, including vessels exercising the right of innocent passage. Such laws and regulations shall, in accordance with Part II, section 3, not hamper innocent passage of foreign vessels.

-UNCLOS, Article 211, section 4.

Asserting Canada's Sovereignty in the Arctic

Canada's preparations for military action in the country's far north are accelerating. In light of Moscow's vocal push toward claiming the Arctic, "if the announced Russian plans proceed, this pristine but fragile region will see a huge buildup of military infrastructure in the coming decades – bases, airfields and ports – as well as fleets of military drones

²⁴ The White House, "National Strategy for the Arctic Region" 4.

patrolling the skies in areas too inhospitable for troops, a possibility discussed by the Canadian military.”²⁵ That prognostication reflects the proximity of a perceived Russian threat to Canada’s far northern territory. While there is arguably little for Russia to gain by invading Canada, the increased vigilance evinced by Canada’s annual Exercise Trillium Response reveals Ottawa’s concern for the Canadian military’s Arctic readiness. According to the Canadian Army’s description of that exercise, “Cold weather skill sets are necessary in order to ensure the CAF’s [Canadian Armed Forces] ability to protect Canadian sovereignty in the North.”²⁶ Furthermore, the ability “to operate in winter conditions within Canada is directly identified in the first of the six core missions within the Canada First Defence [sic] Strategy.”²⁷

Russian posturing in the region is not entirely without provocation. As Canada makes her claims in the Arctic more visible, Russia has responded with military readiness exercises of its own.²⁸ While Arctic states displaying military readiness in their frozen northern reaches is nothing new, the urgency of recent years’ exercises is without precedent. One impetus for Canada’s increased presence in the Arctic is the unsettled legal character of the Northwest Passage.

Northwest Passage Specifically

Already, we are seeing a sharp upturn in Arctic shipping. Again, during the first century of navigation through the Northwest Passage, from 1906 to 2005, there were just 69 full voyages. Yet it took just five more years, from 2006 to 2010,

²⁵ Terrell Johnson, “As Arctic Warms, Canadian Army Shifts Training Focus From Desert to Winter Warfare” *The Weather Channel*, 3 March 2014.

²⁶ Canadian Army, “Operation TRILLIUM RESPONSE” <http://www.army-armee.forces.gc.ca/en/exercises-2013/ex-trillium-response.page>

²⁷ Canadian Army, “Operation TRILLIUM RESPONSE” and Government of Canada, [National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces](#), “Canada First Defence Strategy – Summary” <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/about/canada-first-defence-strategy-summary.page>

²⁸ Luke Harding, “Russia to boost military presence in Arctic as Canada plots north pole claim,” *The Guardian*, 10 December 2013.

for the next 69 full voyages to occur, with 18 taking place in each of 2009 and 2010.

- Michael Byers, "Time to negotiate the Northwest Passage with the United States"

According to Canada's Parliamentary Information and Research Service, "The Northwest Passage is usually defined as the body of Arctic water existing between the Davis Strait and Baffin Bay in the east and the Bering Strait in the west."²⁹ Canadian leaders do not want the legal status of the Northwest Passage to fall under the definition of the UNCLOS.³⁰ In 2006, Canada's Parliament expressed concern over how "Canada's assertion that the Northwest Passage represents internal (territorial) waters has been challenged by other countries, including the United States, which argue that these waters constitute an international strait (international waters)."³¹ Just as some American lawmakers have sought to preserve American sovereignty by blocking ratification of the UNCLOS, so too is Canada's parliament seeking selective application of the treaty. Unlike the US, Canada is a signatory to the UNCLOS. By allowing the Northwest Passage to exist subject to the conditions of the UNCLOS, Canada may find itself in a position whereby it must permit activity harmful to Canadian interests in what Canada defines as its own territorial waters. As an example, in August, 2010 a Russian ship sailing near Baffin Island failed an inspection by Canadian authorities, was impounded, and the ship's owner declared bankruptcy.³² That made the ship Canada's problem, leaving no recourse for the Canadian government to defray the costs of the operation.

Confounding the Northwest Passage issue is the physical geography of Arctic Canada. The northern reach of Canadian territory is

²⁹ Matthew Carnaghan and Allison Goody, "Canadian Arctic Sovereignty," (*Parliamentary Information and Research Service*, Ottawa, Ontario, 2006), 2.

³⁰ Mark Jarashow, et al. "UNCLOS and the Arctic" 1643.

³¹ Matthew Carnaghan and Allison Goody, "Canadian Arctic Sovereignty," 1.

³² Michael Byers, "Time to negotiate the Northwest Passage with the United States" *Policy Options*, October 2011, 71.

the world's largest archipelago and is usually covered in ice, creating a problematical definition between waterways and land.³³ For the purposes of land use in northern Canada, there has traditionally been no differentiation. As ice melts, exposing waterways, Canada "may end up before an international court [and Canada] will bring evidence that shows the people of the Canadian North, or Canadian citizens, in the winter time have treated the ice exactly the same as the land."³⁴

While there is no international contestation of Canada's territorial jurisdiction over the Northwest Passage, there is similarly no impetus for any foreign companies or vessels to seek Canadian permission for transiting the waterway. Importantly, "The problem is that Canada has almost no enforcement capability in the Arctic" even if Ottawa sought to demarcate a hard line dictating which vessels can and cannot pass.³⁵ Without an enforcement mechanism, Canada is in a helpless position to restrict traffic, enforce international law regarding pollution, and will be unable to profit by regulating traffic. The Northwest Passage offers an opportunity to "cut the sea-route for cargo from Europe to the Far East by 4000 miles, from the current route through the Panama Canal, and a ship could eliminate over 6650 nautical miles on a trip from England to Japan."³⁶ Given that advantage, it is logical to infer that international shipping activity will continue to increase regardless of Canada's concerns. Even without the means of enforcing Canadian and international law in the Northwest Passage, Canada faces a dire threat in the form of vessels it deems unsafe cruising (or breaking ice) in Canadian waters.³⁷ If Canadian laws and regulations regarding pollution within its

³³ Cable, Ernest. *Air Force: Leader in the Arctic*. Sic Itur Ad Astra: Canadian Aerospace Power Studies, Volume 4, 2012, 1.

³⁴ Gerhardt, Hannes, et al. "Contested Sovereignty in a Changing Arctic." *Annals of The Association of American Geographers*, 100, no. 4 (October 2010): 994.

³⁵ Michael Byers and Suzanne Lalonde, "Our Arctic sovereignty is on thin ice," *Globe and Mail*, 1 August 2005.

³⁶ Mark Jarashow et. al, "UNCLOS and the Arctic," 1592.

³⁷ Michael Byers and Suzanne Lalonde, "Our Arctic sovereignty is on thin ice."

territorial waters hamper innocent passage of a foreign vessel, those laws and regulations become illegal per the UNCLOS.

Canada's current stand is problematic for two main reasons. First, "Canada has exercised little and fairly erratic control over its northern waters" in the past.³⁸ Second, the US "has opposed any actions by the Canadian government attempting to exert control over the Northwest Passage."³⁹ When taken in concert with Canada's status as a signatory to the UNCLOS, those two issues make the case for Canadian exercise of sovereignty over the Northwest Passage difficult. The Passage's status remains "the root of Canada's most significant and enduring dispute with the United States" and it is in Canada's as well as the United States' best interest to resolve this geopolitical sticking point.⁴⁰

Russia's Arctic Interests

Contemporary Russian overtures in the Arctic reflect how Moscow understands the petrochemical situation there. Increasingly unfettered by Western opinions of its geostrategic machinations, Russian decision makers have chosen to take a forceful tone in asserting their economic interests in the Arctic and elsewhere. This is not a new phenomenon, though after several years of ostensibly cooling tensions between Moscow and the West, Russia's overtures are increasing regional tensions.⁴¹ To point, "Russia's multibillion-dollar rearming of its northern and eastern naval, air and land combat capabilities has raised the ire of its Nordic neighbors,"⁴² within the last year. Of the three major Arctic powers (the US, Canada, and Russia), Russia has exhibited the most assertive and

³⁸ Mark Jarashow et. al, "UNCLOS and the Arctic," 1618.

³⁹ Mark Jarashow et. al, "UNCLOS and the Arctic," 1619.

⁴⁰ Michael Byers, "Time to negotiate the Northwest Passage with the United States," 68.

⁴¹ Ronald O'Rourke, "Changes in the Arctic," 50.

⁴² Gerard O'Dwyer, "NATO Rejects Direct Arctic Presence," *Defense News*, 29 May 2013.

definitional behavior in the Arctic.⁴³ From the bombastic display of claiming the Arctic sea floor by dropping a flag there,⁴⁴ to vociferously announcing the Arctic region's vitality to Russia's security, Moscow has made clear that it speaks loudly when it comes to the Arctic. Since "most of Russia's nuclear missile submarines are based north of the Arctic Circle at Severomorsk,"⁴⁵ it is logical to infer that the impending opening of a greater portion of the Arctic to year round shipping will only increase the importance Moscow has already demonstrated toward their military presence there. This is not surprising given Russia's vast coastline (and corresponding undersea continental shelf) along the Arctic Ocean. As a state that claims "nearly half of the Arctic Ocean" as its own sovereign territory,⁴⁶ Russia's geopolitical machinations concerning the Arctic warrant examination.

Resource Extraction

Apart from any perceived need to bolster its security in the Arctic, Russia's reliance on revenue from oil is forcing Russian attention northward. In their work "Russian Arctic Petroleum Resources," A. Zolotukhin and V. Gavrilov observed,

Today Arctic gas is more expensive than traditional gas and even shale gas that recently emerged [on] the market. However, continuous and steadily increasing market demand and its proximity to the shipping routes from the Arctic seas, huge quantities of gas under northern seas and, not the least, the growing competition between different primary energy sources are the strong motivations for technology

⁴³ J. Michael Cole, "Militarization of the Arctic Heats Up, Russia Takes the Lead." *The Diplomat*, 6 December 2013. See also see Fred Weir, "Arctic resource race heats up, as Russia, Canada stake new claims." *The Christian Science Monitor*, 11 December 2013.

⁴⁴ *The Economist*, "Canada's Arctic Claim: Is Santa Canadian?" 12 December 2013.

⁴⁵ Michael Byers, "Time to negotiate the Northwest Passage with the United States," 70.

⁴⁶ Mark Jarashow, et. al, "UNCLOS and the Arctic," 1630.

development. Pretty soon demand for development in the Arctic will be high.⁴⁷

The high price of the Arctic's oil and gas is not deterring Moscow. Russia "needs Arctic production to offset the decline in its main west Siberian oil fields."⁴⁸ Efforts at securing Russian access to Arctic oilfields dovetail with Russia's bellicose overtures. By making it known that Russia will forcefully defend its extractive activity in what it considers the Russian Arctic, Moscow is betraying the high level of importance it attaches to those activities. That is important because it reveals that there may be more than heated rhetoric behind Moscow's pugnacious stance in the Arctic. If Russia perceives a real threat to its Arctic interests, it may find itself in a position where it has backed itself into a corner, leaving military action as the only option available.

Perhaps more than any other state, Russia is a mainstay of Arctic power politics. As the prolific Arctic researcher and explorer Terrence Armstrong noted in 1958, "If the Arctic is the place to watch in the polar regions, the Soviet Union is the place to watch in the Arctic."⁴⁹ His observation is no less poignant in 2014, substituting the Russian Federation for the USSR. Russia has a claim on the Northeast Passage (also called the Northern Route). That waterway skirts the Russian littoral and few would contest the route as falling within Russian sovereign waters. When a Chinese shipping company "sent the first container vessel through the passage [in summer, 2013]—traveling from Dalian, China, to Rotterdam...The trip took 35 days, compared with the average 48 days it takes through the traditional [Suez Canal] route."⁵⁰ The ability to navigate through the Russian littoral will bring new opportunities for Russian resource extraction and distribution.

⁴⁷ A. Zolotukhin and V. Gavrilov, "Russian Arctic Petroleum Resources," *Oil & Gas Science and Technology – Rev. IFP Energies nouvelles* Vol. 66 (2011), No. 6, 905-906.

⁴⁸ *The Economist*, "Resources: Hidden Treasures," 16 Jun 2012.

⁴⁹ Terrence Armstrong. *The Russians in the Arctic*, 13.

⁵⁰ Costas Paris, "Wrong Type of Ice Hampers the Northern Sea Route" *The Wall Street Journal*, 29 Apr 14.

Taking into consideration Russia's robust extant military presence in the Arctic, it is unlikely that Russia will entertain any questioning or challenges to its Arctic sovereignty. The Greenpeace ship episode is a good demonstration of Russia's lack of reservations in forcefully asserting its sovereignty in the Arctic.⁵¹ From that example whereby Moscow ordered the impounding of a civilian ship and the detention of its crew, it is evident that Russia can be quick to react to any perceived affront to its sovereignty in the region.

Beijing's Backdoor to the Arctic – China's Economic Invasion of Iceland

Russia is not the only state racing to reap the benefits of Arctic shipping and natural resource exploitation. In *Foreign Affairs*, Managing Director of CargoMetrics and co-founder of the nonprofit organization Arctic Circle Scott G. Borgerson wrote, "No region so rich in resources, both real and man-made, can avoid attracting the attention of China for long."⁵² Like Borgerson, *The Economist* has also highlighted Beijing's designs on activities in the Arctic, noting how "China has invested both financially and diplomatically in the Arctic."⁵³ That is not surprising given China's massive rate of resource consumption and growing blue water commercial and military capabilities. China has defined itself as a "near Arctic state" and an "Arctic stakeholder."⁵⁴ Like Russia, China is demonstrating an increasing dependence on oil sourced from the Arctic. Per *The Diplomat*, "China is the largest consumer and importer of energy resources in the world but its vast geographical distance from the Arctic limits Beijing's opportunity."⁵⁵ By funding developments in Russian

⁵¹ *The Economist*, "Dutch Speed Skaters: On Russian Ice," 10 February 2014.

⁵² Scott Borgerson, "The Coming Arctic Boom." *Foreign Affairs* 92.4 (2013): 76.

⁵³ *The Economist*, "Snow Dragons" 1 September 2012.

⁵⁴ Gwynn Guilford, "What is China's Arctic Game plan?" *The Atlantic*, 6 May 2013.

⁵⁵ Arthur Guschin, "Understanding China's Arctic Policies," *The Diplomat*, 14 November 2013.

infrastructure, Chinese access to Arctic oil has grown in recent years.⁵⁶ In typical Chinese fashion, Beijing is nurturing a regional foothold by economic enticement of a local state. China is currently wooing Iceland for inroads to the region.⁵⁷ As O'Rourke noted in his Congressional report, "In April 2013, China and Iceland signed a free trade agreement – China's first such pact with a European government."⁵⁸ He continued, "in August 2012, the [state-of-the-art polar capable research vessel, the *Snow Dragon*] conducted a trans-Arctic voyage, from Shanghai to Iceland."⁵⁹ Those developments are telling of Beijing's putative interest in the Arctic and Iceland particularly.

Looking even further ahead toward an increasingly ice-free Arctic, the China Ocean Shipping Company (COSCO) is courting Iceland for the construction of a harbor to provide transshipment facilities on Iceland's east coast. Malte Humpert of the Arctic Institute's Center for Circumpolar Security Studies observed how "This would allow China to gain a strategic foothold in the region and allow Iceland to potentially benefit from its strategic location at the entrance of the Arctic Ocean."⁶⁰ It makes sense that China would advance a relationship ostensibly offering mutual benefit to its putative Scandinavian hosts. In reference to Reykjavik capitalizing on the changing situation of Arctic ice, "Icelanders, who pay close attention to climate change science, know the entire Arctic Ocean will soon be seasonally ice-free — and that this will create an even shorter route 'straight over the top' that will pass close by their country."⁶¹

⁵⁶ Michael Byers, "China could be the future of Arctic oil," *Al Jazeera.com*, 22 August 2013.

⁵⁷ Zdeněk Křifž and Filip Chrástanský, "Perception Of The Situation In The Arctic By Key Actors And The Possibility Of Conflict Escalation," *Defence and Strategy (Obrana a strategie)*, issue: 1 / 2011, 15.

⁵⁸ Ronald O'Rourke, "Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress," 56.

⁵⁹ Ronald O'Rourke, "Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress," 56.

⁶⁰ Malte Humpert, "The Future of Arctic Shipping: A New Silk Road for China?" Washington, DC: *The Arctic Institute Center for Circumpolar Security Studies*, November 2013, 12.

⁶¹ Michael Byers, "Stephen Harper should make like a Viking," *Toronto Star*, 28 October 2013.

If a military threat fails to drive a change of behavior in the Arctic, an economic one surely will. The Sino-Icelandic example is a strong indicator of that fact. Considering that Iceland, a founding member of NATO, is actively courting development of facilities at the behest of Beijing, it is clear that states that are not active in shaping their own fate in the Arctic will be left behind. Since “Beijing has a history of acquiring strategic assets abroad through agents disguised as commercial entities,” it is logical to infer that Chinese investment in Iceland reflects Beijing’s geostrategic aims in the region.⁶² From a realist political perspective, any gains China wins in the Arctic will come at a cost to some other regional player.

Iceland offers a rich opportunity for further geopolitical study of the changing Arctic. As a state situated in a critical geostrategic position, access to and presence in Iceland will be a prize to any state that seeks a position of influence in the Arctic. That fact is evident when one explores the level of attention a small state of less than 350,000 attracts from world powers. A bastion of American military might from the end of the Second World War until 2006, Iceland was a crucial host and partner in securing American geostrategic interests for many decades. Even before the current iteration of climate change began opening the Arctic, Iceland was a critically important feature of America’s security enterprise. As American investment in the island nation showed during World War II and the Cold War, Iceland has hosted great power geostrategic machinations before. It is not surprising that when America’s interests turned elsewhere, Iceland’s geostrategic relevance remained. As China and other states seek expanded influence in Iceland, that fact becomes clearer.

⁶² Geo-Strategy Direct, “China gaining foothold in Arctic by leasing large land area from Iceland,” *International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center*, 16 May 2012: 9.

Iceland's Nordic fellows Norway and Denmark have increased their partnerships with Reykjavik in the wake of America's departure from the island. As *Military Periscope* notes:

Iceland signed a defense cooperation agreement with Norway in April 2007. Norway agreed to help protect Icelandic sovereignty, including surveillance and defense of Icelandic airspace and its maritime economic zone. Oslo, however, did not provide any security guarantees. Denmark also signed a similar agreement with Iceland in April 2007. That accord calls for Denmark and Iceland to cooperate on defense issues, including visits from Danish forces, common training and joint exercises.⁶³

As evidenced by Norway and Denmark's commitment to Iceland, those two states are proving that a military presence in Iceland is analogous to increased influence in the Arctic.

Iceland may reveal itself once more to be a keystone state in the future of Arctic policy for many Arctic players. Future strategic studies of the Arctic would do well to analyze in depth the implications Iceland can add to the regional geostrategic situation. Like Norway and Denmark, Beijing is demonstrably aware of that fact.

NATO

NATO is a key player in the Arctic. Ana-Maria Ghimiş of the Centre for European Policy Evaluation wrote in 2013:

The involvement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in the Arctic region is for sure at stake, given the fact that four of the five rim-states (US, Canada, Denmark and Norway) are members of NATO, especially if some of them have expressively requested for its intervention. This organization acts as a global player with equal responsibilities in terms of stabilizing military threatening imbalances that could lead to the development of unstable regions. Therefore, it can claim

⁶³ Military Periscope, NATO – Iceland overview, <https://www-militaryperiscope-com.aufric.idm.oclc.org/nations/nato/iceland/organzn/index.html> accessed 2 May 2, 2014.

that it has the legitimate right to be involved in the High North and that the allies have certainly the interest to involve it, as Russia is continuing its military development strategy.⁶⁴

Other researchers have highlighted NATO's important role in maintaining stability and offsetting Russian maneuvering in the Arctic. In her July, 2013 research paper "Putting the 'N' back into NATO: A High North policy framework for the Atlantic Alliance?" Brooke A. Smith-Windsor "Endeavors to explain the reasons for, and the consequences of, NATO's marginalization from contemporary Arctic security affairs since 2009."⁶⁵ Her analysis highlights how "since 2009...aside from NATO's ongoing air surveillance mission in Iceland, [NATO] has largely been left 'out in the cold' when it comes to shaping and contributing to security in the High North."⁶⁶ She brings up valid questions, particularly in light of China's robust interest in generating a presence in Iceland. China is not the only Arctic-interested state whose actions warrant attention. Distressingly, "In March 2009...Russia's NATO ambassador stated that Moscow would not cooperate with the alliance on Arctic matters."⁶⁷ That is particularly troubling given Russia's recent demonstration of willingness to use force unilaterally in Ukraine, in pursuit of Russian interests. With such disparate aims, Russia, China, and NATO do not currently enjoy a common framework for cooperating in the Arctic.

Smith-Windsor shows that apart from the potential ecological risks of increased human activity in the Arctic, the rush of interest in the region brings the threat of challenges to Arctic states' sovereignty.⁶⁸ As previously detailed, today's changing Arctic is bringing new interests to the region. When non-NATO, non-Arctic states pursue their agendas

⁶⁴ Ana-Maria Ghimis. "Rim Versus Non-Rim States in the Arctic Region: Prospects for a Zero-Sum Game Or a Win-Win One?" *Romanian Journal of European Affairs* 13, no. 3 (09, 2013): 43.

⁶⁵ Brooke A. Smith-Windsor, "Putting the 'N' back into NATO: A High North policy framework for the Atlantic Alliance?" *Research Division, NATO Defense College – Rome*, no. 94 (July 2013): 3.

⁶⁶ Brooke A. Smith-Windsor, "Putting the 'N' back into NATO," 3.

⁶⁷ Ronald O'Rourke, "Changes in the Arctic," 60.

⁶⁸ Brooke A. Smith-Windsor, "Putting the 'N' back into NATO," 4, 8.

within the geographic realm of NATO states, without attention from NATO members, American, Canadian, Icelandic and other member states' options are limited. While the Arctic may soon be open to transit and exploitation by non-Arctic states, NATO must be prepositioned to respond to the potential threats posed by those activities. The consequences of not doing so may manifest themselves in the form of real threats to NATO states' security. Since there is a "strong historical correlation between Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and seaborne trade," NATO should prepare for states across the globe to attempt to leverage the potential moneymaking opportunities afforded by the advantage of shipping across the Arctic.⁶⁹

Conclusion

Arctic interested states need to work together to protect the newest global commons. Active steps to prevent war and pollution are necessary. A good starting point could be collective investment to safeguard common access to the region. As things stand in 2014, "tug escorts are largely non-existent, and rescue tugs are few and far between" in the Arctic.⁷⁰ By remedying that issue in particular, the US, Canada, and Russia could mitigate the environmental threat to their own coastlines and waters while simultaneously forwarding their respective economic interests.

As states continue to pursue their strategic and economic interests in the Arctic, the potential for competition increases. The United States and Canada stand to solidify their own claims on Arctic territory. China stands to benefit by a melting Arctic expediting shipping by "shortening sea lanes connecting Northeast Asia and Europe by about 2,500 miles."⁷¹

⁶⁹ DNV (Det Norske Veritas), "Shipping across the Arctic Ocean," 11.

⁷⁰ John Roach, "The next Exxon Valdez? Remote Alaskan waters, experts fear," CNBC.com, 24 March 2014.

⁷¹ Geo-Strategy Direct, "China harbors Arctic ambitions that put Alaska on the frontline," *International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center*, March 21, 2012, 3.

By courting Iceland with economic incentives and a bolstered diplomatic presence, China is actively working to establish a foothold in the Arctic. Like China, Norway and Denmark have Arctic interests and desire a stronger relationship with Reykjavik.

As previously “nonterritorial regions” in the Arctic become increasingly defined in a legally territorial manner, states should invest in a common legal framework to prevent conflict. One example of such an investment can be found in America’s efforts at defining the Panama Canal Zone in the 19th and early 20th centuries.



Chapter 3

Preemptive Diplomacy: America and the Panama Canal

President Hayes declared in a special message of March 8, 1880, that it was "the right and the duty of the United States to assert and maintain such supervision and authority over any interoceanic canal across the isthmus" as would protect the national interests and that the canal would be "virtually a part of the coast-line of the United States."

- John Holladay Latané, The Panama Canal Act and the British Protest, 1913

Introduction

The Panama Canal is one of Earth's most important strategic chokepoints.¹ It has served as a vital conduit of shipping in times of peace and war.² That it lies within American hegemonic territory and that the United States administered access to the canal from its completion through the end of the 20th century is no accident. Successful use of America's diplomatic power delivered the Panama Canal into Washington's hands. The United States in 1848 ratified a treaty with New Grenada certifying, "that the right of way or transit across the isthmus of Panama...shall be open and free to the Government and citizens of the United States."³ That accord showed how "for almost the first time, the country had a strategic interest outside its continental borders."⁴ With territorial rights it acquired peaceably (though arguably via duplicitous methods), the United States created a navigational phenomenon that fundamentally changed its security structure.⁵ Legal scholar Norman J. Padelford captured that sentiment when he wrote about the Canal in 1941: "From the commencement of its undertaking the United States government has regarded the Panama

¹ Air University, *AU-18: Space Primer* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2010), 35.

² Norman J. Padelford, "Neutrality, Belligerency, and the Panama Canal." *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Jan., 1941): 77.

³ Matthew Parker, *Panama Fever: The Epic Story of One of the Greatest Human Achievements of All Time – The Building of the Panama Canal* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 18.

⁴ Matthew Parker, *Panama Fever*, 18.

⁵ John Holladay Latané. *The United States and Latin America* (New York: Doubleday, 1920), 268-270.

Canal as an instrument of national defense.”⁶ America’s view of the canal as part of a growing defense footprint dovetails with the growing prestige and interest America experienced in the years before the canal project.

In this chapter, I will explore the history of the Canal, analyze how the United States created the conditions whereby it benefitted by proactively staking its interests in the Panama Canal and synthesize a “so what” regarding the canal project and its impact on world geostrategic affairs. I will examine the historical context of the project, with particular emphasis on the diplomatic situation as it evolved from 1850 to the canal’s opening in 1914. Additionally, I will analyze how decision makers in the United States successfully laid the diplomatic groundwork to control the Panama Canal for its first 63 years in operation. By building the canal, enabling the birth of the Panamanian state, and peaceably negotiating the canal’s status with the world’s preeminent colonial and naval power of the day, the United States performed a masterful feat of diplomacy in the Panama Canal.

I. History

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the United States wielded its growing diplomatic and economic instruments of power to secure control over the Panama Canal. By constructing the canal and administering it until 1977, the United States demonstrated a masterful use of its political instrument of power.⁷ While American economic, military, and informational might were critical to the success of the endeavor, Washington’s diplomatic heft most directly secured American interests in the Panama Canal. By stipulating the neutrality of the canal from the very beginning, the United States indemnified itself from

⁶ Norman J. Padelford, “Neutrality, Belligerency, and the Panama Canal,” 55.

⁷ Pratrap Chaterjee, “Indebted Spanish Consortium Threatens to Stop Panama Canal Expansion Unless it is Paid an Extra \$1.6 Billion,” *Global Research*, 7 January 2014.

alienating other states who would seek to benefit from the canal.⁸ That was a critically important diplomatic move on the part of the US government because it lent credibility to America's claims of the canal being an international entity for all nations to enjoy.

Why build it?

John Holliday Latané observed, "The cutting of the isthmus between North and South America was the dream of navigators and engineers from the time when the first discoverers ascertained that nature had neglected to provide a passage."⁹ As seafaring European powers increasingly exploited the New World, their interest in building a canal grew. Spanish ideations of a canal appear as early as 1534.¹⁰ Though predated by the Spanish and British, American aims for a canal are similarly longstanding. Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson foresaw a canal through the Panamanian isthmus as far back as 1781.¹¹ In the late 19th century, Europe's colonial holdings were disappearing across the globe. The shrinking number of garrisoned European forces throughout the non-European world translated into diminished influence and curtailed geostrategic options for Europe's imperial powers. That contraction of a colonial footprint combined with the growing ubiquity of oil-powered ships making their earlier steam-powered predecessors obsolete was redefining the importance of sea power. With less need for coaling stations and surface vessels able to travel faster and further than ever before, the long-held dream of a nautical shortcut through the

⁸ Responding to British protest over the US Government's decision to allow American ships to pass through the canal free from tolls, President Taft wrote in 1912, "The canal shall be free and open to the vessels of commerce and of war of all nations observing these rules, on terms of entire equality, so that there shall be no discrimination against any such nation, or its citizens or subjects, in respect of the conditions or charges of traffic, or otherwise. Such conditions and charges of traffic shall be just and equitable." Of course, as the builder and administrator of the Canal, the US felt it could make special provisions for US shipping. See Editorial, "The Panama Canal Act," *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (Oct., 1912), 982-983.

⁹ John Holladay Latané. *The United States and Latin America*, 144.

¹⁰ Matthew Parker, *Panama Fever*, 6.

¹¹ Matthew Parker, *Panama Fever*, 12.

Panamanian isthmus achieved critical momentum by the late 19th century.

France accomplished an impressive feat in completing the Suez Canal in the mid-19th century. An engineering project of a magnitude difficult to overestimate, the Suez Canal realized millennia of dreams to connect the Red and Mediterranean Seas. Like the Panama Canal would later represent, Suez was a multinational effort that relied on foreign engineering expertise backed by foreign capital. In Egypt, it was French leadership that eventually completed the project and linked Europe to points east through a substantial shortcut. It is important to note that France was not the only foreign power to invest in the Suez Canal project, even though French efforts ultimately completed the endeavor. Panama was a similarly international affair. America's investment in the Panama Canal project filled the void that existed when French leaders abandoned their attempt to build the Canal.

After Suez, Paris's confidence for a similar success in Panama was high. By orchestrating the completion of the Suez Canal, French icon and national hero Ferdinand de Lesseps was the logical choice for taking over the French-led engineering project in Central America. He brought his bravado and leadership acumen with him to New York in 1880 to begin fundraising for the Panama Canal.¹² France foresaw an ambitious project in Panama. In his accounting of the Panama Canal, Latané wrote, "The De Lesseps plan provided for an open cut throughout at the sea-level, at an estimated cost of \$170,000,000."¹³ However, de Lesseps did not accurately appraise the intricacies of such an immense undertaking in the hostile tropical environment. Accordingly, several prominent Frenchmen and Americans objected to his version of the plan for a canal.¹⁴ In spite of the gargantuan French effort failing to complete

¹² Matthew Parker, *Panama Fever*, 81-84.

¹³ John Holladay Latané. *The United States and Latin America*, 146.

¹⁴ Matthew Parker, *Panama Fever*, 65.

a canal, de Lesseps refused to retreat from his insistence that the waterway be sea level and without locks.¹⁵ With de Lesseps in charge of the project, French hopes for a repeat of their glory in the Egyptian desert died. Latané concluded, “The work was begun in 1884 and prosecuted until 1888, when the gigantic scheme collapsed, after the company had expended about \$300,000,000 and accomplished less than one-third of the work.”¹⁶ After France’s massive monetary expenditure and an estimated 16,500 dead workers, de Lesseps and his investors had nothing to show for their efforts.¹⁷

II. America Completes and Controls the Panama Canal

I confidently maintain that the recognition of the Republic of Panama was an act justified by the interests of collective civilization. If ever a government could be said to have received a mandate from civilization to effect an object the accomplishment of which was demanded in the interest of mankind, the United States holds that position with regard to the interoceanic canal.

-President Theodore Roosevelt, 1904

America steps in to finish the job

Prior to France’s failure to repeat the type of success they enjoyed at Suez, President Roosevelt and other American statesmen voiced their collective belief that the Panama Canal was destined to be an American phenomenon.¹⁸ After de Lesseps and his contingent withdrew in disgrace from the French-led attempt to complete the Panama Canal, America’s dreams of an isthmian passage re-kindled with a newly imagined idea of what the canal should be. Though the work site would lay dormant until 1904, the Spanish-American War of 1898 reinvigorated the American discourse on the subject of an isthmian waterway. That

¹⁵ Matthew Parker, *Panama Fever*, 175.

¹⁶ John Holladay Latané. *The United States and Latin America*, 146.

¹⁷ Center of Military History, United States Army, *The Panama Canal: An Army Enterprise* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2009), 18.

¹⁸ John Holladay Latané, “The Panama Canal Act and the British Protest,” *The American Journal of International Law* Vol. 7, No. 1 (Jan., 1913), 20.

conflict offered a “made to order” case showing the need for a shortcut between America’s coasts.¹⁹ However, “since de Lesseps’ failure in Panama seemed to provide ample evidence of that route’s unsuitability, Nicaragua remained the lead candidate in the eyes of most interested parties” within the US Government.²⁰ Ultimately, American decision makers settled on Panama instead of Nicaragua for their planned canal. Indeed, “A canal across the isthmus would be one-third the length of its Nicaraguan competitor, require fewer locks, and be easier to navigate and cheaper to operate. Panama also boasted better harbors on both coasts.”²¹

Under the American plan, the canal would use locks to raise and lower ships, ultimately requiring less earthmoving than the French plan. The first American to head the pickup of the aborted French effort was John Findley Wallace. He was unable to complete the canal owing to a host of reasons. The US Army’s history of the Canal states, “Exasperated by the red tape the [US government’s Second Isthmian Canal Commission] required, fearing for his health, and lured by a higher-paying position elsewhere, Wallace resigned in June 1905.”²² He vacated his position on 28 June, 1905, making way for experienced railroad executive John Frank Stevens to take over as leader of the project.²³

As Wallace’s successor, Stevens was better equipped to succeed in Panama when he arrived in July 1905.²⁴ The progress of anti-malarial drugs helped keep his workforce healthy.²⁵ Furthermore, he invested heavily in improving the quality of life for his workers, understanding

¹⁹ Matthew Parker, *Panama Fever*, 200.

²⁰ Center of Military History, United States Army, *The Panama Canal*, 7.

²¹ Center of Military History, United States Army, *The Panama Canal*, 8.

²² Center of Military History, United States Army, *The Panama Canal*, 11.

²³ M. H. Thatcher, “The Panama Canal” *Register of Kentucky State Historical Society*, Vol. 13, No. 37 (January, 1915), 58.

²⁴ Matthew Parker, *Panama Fever*, 305.

²⁵ America's Mission of Compassion Abroad: Remarks by Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy G. Thompson as prepared for the Woodrow Wilson Board of Trustees and Council Meeting, Jun 04, 2003 <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/americas-mission-compassion-abroad> accessed 8 Apr 14.

that low morale was a serious impediment to completing the project.²⁶ Although he resigned in frustration and exhaustion on April 1, 1907, Stevens had overseen positive change in the Panama Canal project.²⁷ Matthew Parker observed how when the U.S. Army took over from Stevens, “the project had come full circle. After all, the military needs of the United States had been of primary importance in starting the American canal. It was as a conduit of sea power that the canal’s supporters had successfully sold the idea to the U.S. Congress and public.”²⁸ Lieutenant Colonel George Washington Goethals took over from Stevens and “was appointed chief engineer, head of the [Panama Rail Road], and would wield total control over the government of the Canal Zone.”²⁹ Goethals went on to finish the canal ahead of schedule in 1914.³⁰

American Diplomacy Prevails

Even before the Canal opened for business, it was clear that America would have to temper its exclusivity to the entity by ensuring the Canal became a global commons. Scholar Peter C. Haines captured that sentiment in 1909, observing, “all maritime nations of the world will have acquired rights of navigation that can not [sic] be ignored, no matter how inconvenient it may be to ourselves to recognize them.”³¹ In an era replete with imperial and colonial overtures, this realization was remarkably far-sighted. It shows that American thinkers understood how the Canal would have to serve international interests if America was to benefit without the expense of perpetual war. Accordingly, the United States engaged in treaties with other world powers to prevent conflict. Of

²⁶ Matthew Parker, *Panama Fever*, 334-335.

²⁷ Matthew Parker, *Panama Fever*, 391-393.

²⁸ Matthew Parker, *Panama Fever*, 395.

²⁹ Matthew Parker, *Panama Fever*, 396.

³⁰ Center of Military History, United States Army, *The Panama Canal*, iii, 73.

³¹ Peter C. Hains, “Neutralization of the Panama Canal” *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Apr., 1909): 384.

note, the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of 1850 with Great Britain was a masterful diplomatic overture.³² This treaty drastically diminished British power in Central America while paving the way for the Panama Canal Act many years later.³³ Specifically, the treaty established that neither the United States nor Great Britain “will ever obtain or maintain for itself any exclusive control over the said ship canal...[in] any part of Central America.”³⁴ Although subsequent treaties would vitiate the terms of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, it set an important precedent, stripping Great Britain of her theretofore outsized imperial influence in Central America. The treaty was particularly impressive given the recent Anglo-American hostility of the day, manifested most acutely in the War of 1812, concluded a mere 38 years prior. Still, American political elites did not use their newfound clout to disenfranchise other states who would seek to use the canal. In 1912, American decision makers believed that “the United States enjoys absolute rights of ownership and control” over the Panama Canal, yet they understood that international agreements were “not intended to limit or hamper the United States in the exercise of its sovereign power to deal with its own commerce, using its own canal in whatsoever manner it saw fit.”³⁵

I will now turn to examination of the way America’s elites pursued their interests in Central America and the Panama Canal project. When the Panama Canal linked the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, it ushered in a new era of communication. Substantially shortened shipping distances and the subsequent cost savings for oversea commerce characterize the Canal. The route from the east coast of the United States to Japan via the Canal is 3,000 miles shorter than the route around Cape Horn. The

³² Mario Rodríguez, “The ‘Prometheus’ and the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty,” *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Sep., 1964): 260.

³³ John Holladay Latané. *The United States and Latin America*, 152-155.

³⁴ Text of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, Article I, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/br1850.asp, accessed 3 May 2014.

³⁵ Editorial, “The Panama Canal Act” *The American Journal of International Law* Vol. 6, No. 4 (Oct., 1912): 982-983.

route from the west coast of South America to Europe is 5,000 miles shorter.³⁶ Most importantly for the American Navy of the late 19th and early 20th century, the San Francisco to New York route through the canal saved nearly 7,000 miles. Having that shortcut multiplied America's (and her allies') strategic flexibility. Whenever the need arose to move US warships from the Pacific to the Atlantic, the Panama Canal would prove to be a substantial expediter.

American security interests included a presence in the Caribbean region prior to the Spanish American War. However, that war cemented American hegemony in the Caribbean, serving notice to any European power seeking to maintain a significant presence in the region. The coupling of American desires for dominance in the Caribbean with America's decision to take the lead on the Panama Canal project left no ambiguity as to Washington's designs for hemispheric preeminence by the close of the 19th century. Importantly, American designs on the Panama Canal began well prior to the 1898 war with Spain. Although Great Britain was an early objector to American administration of the Panama Canal, American diplomatic efforts succeeded in overcoming British opposition to America's central role in the Canal project.

The Spanish-American War was an important prelude to the geopolitical gains the United States would reap in the Panama Canal project. By ejecting a major European naval power from the Caribbean, Washington was free to exercise unimpeded influence in the region. When French efforts at completing the Panama Canal expired in earnest, the only remaining obstacle preventing American lead of the canal project was Colombia. As a Colombian-controlled territory, Panama was not independent prior to America's efforts at gaining a foothold there. After Spanish withdrawal from Central and South America, Panama fell under

³⁶ The Panama Canal Authority, "Trade Routes," <http://www.pancanal.com/eng/op/routes.html>, accessed 25 Feb 14.

Colombian domination by default in the 1826 Congress of Panama.³⁷ The agreement proved unpalatable in Panama. Indeed, “Three abortive attempts to separate the isthmus from Colombia occurred between 1830 and 1840.”³⁸ The era saw sporadic deployments of American sea power attempting to stabilize the situation. While American influence expedited the Panamanian revolution of 1903, “the United States Navy did not make the Panama Revolution, nor did it create the conditions which engendered rebellion. The separatist idea had long been a tradition on the Isthmus.”³⁹ After the American-assisted revolution, newly independent Panama and the United States signed the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty, whose stipulations included exceptionally favorable terms for America. They incorporated a perpetual grant of land to build and use a Canal, defined the legal status of the territory as sovereign US territory, and cost America a mere “\$10,000,000 upon ratification and \$250,000 annually beginning nine years after the ratification.”⁴⁰

The Panama Canal was America’s most audacious imperial assertion of the 20th century. Since the earliest days of plans to cut a canal through the Isthmus of Panama, legal definitions of ownership have been onerous, convoluted and problematic. By the time America finished the canal, Panama would gain its independence from Colombia in a near-bloodless, one-day revolution. Worth noting, not all players in Panama saw the Canal as favorably as did the Americans of the early 20th Century. Arnold Wilson described such a sentiment that persisted long after the project’s completion: “It is a foreign enclave in the State of Panama which was detached from Colombia by Theodore Roosevelt by means which Central and South American States do not allow

³⁷ Sandra W. Meditz and Dennis M. Hanratty, editors. *Panama: A Country Study*. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1987. <http://countrystudies.us/panama/4.htm>

³⁸ Sandra W. Meditz and Dennis M. Hanratty, editors. *Panama: A Country Study*.

³⁹ Robert A. Friedlander, “A Reassessment of Roosevelt’s Role in the Panamanian Revolution of 1903” *The Western Political Quarterly* Vol. 14, No. 2 (Jun., 1961), 538.

⁴⁰ Mercer D. Tate, “The Panama Canal and Political Partnership” *The Journal of Politics* Vol. 25, No. 1 (Feb., 1963), 119-120.

themselves to forget.”⁴¹ More importantly, America’s emerging global power was fully on display in the Canal. August 15th, 1914 marked a date whereby the world’s two largest oceans met and American geopolitical position reached a new zenith.⁴² Worldwide shipping underwent a revolution under the armed and watchful eye of America.

America Creates the Republic of Panama through Diplomacy

[Taft] was convinced that democracy is a form of government that requires education and precedent and, above all, an educated citizenry, literate and capable of understanding issues. Such was not the prevailing situation in Panama and would not be so for a long period of time. Taft was not prepared to see a vital interest of the United States sacrificed upon the altar of what he considered to be, in this instance, a meaningless abstraction.

- Ralph Eldin Minger, “The Panama Canal Zone and Titular Sovereignty

Panama’s birth as a state resulted from foreign entities’ ambitions for a canal. France’s unsuccessful attempts at digging a passageway between the Pacific and Atlantic nurtured the notion for Panamanian statehood. Panamanian independence, as promulgated by the American government some years later, was simply a means to an end. A government in Panama free from Colombian domination was more amenable to American options in the region. The fact that a rival government in Bogota sought to stymie European designs on controlling ship traffic through a putative canal was understandable from a geostrategic standpoint. Like Colombia, the United States sought a means of limiting foreign influence over the region and control of the Canal. As a rising power, American interests extended beyond the continental United States in the late 19th century and early 20th century.

⁴¹ Sir Arnold Wilson, MP, “The Suez Canal” *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1931-1939) Vol. 18, No. 3 (May - Jun., 1939), 381.

⁴² Norman J. Padelford, “American Rights in the Panama Canal” *The American Journal of International Law* Vol. 34, No. 3 (Jul., 1940), 416.

When American decision makers engineered the Panamanian revolt, Colombia was nearly powerless to stop the formation of the state of Panama. The new rulers of Panama felt indebted to America for underwriting their independence. That feeling of obligation led to a situation whereby America was able to dictate the terms of American involvement in the canal's construction and administration. This situation represented a striking example of American imperialist expansion. First, the US had helped to oust a colonial Colombian presence from its own controlled territory. Second, the US effectively created a puppet state that would be unable or unwilling to resist American demands. The honeymoon period between the rulers of the newly independent Panamanian Republic and President Roosevelt's administration was brief. Indeed, "the United States had barely taken formal possession of the Canal Zone when the first major dispute arose with the Republic of Panama" over "ports of entry, customs houses, tariffs, and post offices in the Canal Zone."⁴³ Ultimately, the legal groundwork American statesmen laid in Panama stifled Panamanian efforts to mitigate American control over the Panama Canal until Washington decided to extricate itself from the region.

III. So What

America built, defined, defended and exploited the Panama Canal and the associated Canal Zone. The most important geopolitical impact of the canal was that "completion of the canal put the world on notice that it now had to reckon with the United States as a global power."⁴⁴ By the time Washington relinquished control of the Canal, it had become a vestige of "Yankee imperialism, the one conspicuous symbol remaining of

⁴³ Ralph Eldin Minger, "The Panama Canal Zone, and Titular Sovereignty" *The Western Political Quarterly* Vol. 14, No. 2 (Jun., 1961), 546.

⁴⁴ Center of Military History, United States Army, *The Panama Canal*, 2.

'manifest destiny' and the big stick era."⁴⁵ More importantly, by the time Panama gained sovereignty over the canal, American power and prestige no longer hinged on exclusive control. In spite of the "long history of unilateral American actions and paternalistic attitudes toward Panama between 1903 and 1964," both sides peacefully negotiated the iterative return of the Canal Zone to Panama.⁴⁶ America had exploited the Canal and gotten what it sought via Theodore Roosevelt's deft endeavor. By 1973, American leaders acquiesced to appeals from the United Nations and the Panamanian government for an end to unilateral American control of the Canal. Sandra W. Meditz and Dennis M. Hanratty detailed the transition in their 1987 work:

In early 1974, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Panamanian foreign minister Juan Antonio Tack announced their agreement on eight principles...[including] recognition of Panamanian sovereignty in the Canal Zone; immediate enhancement of economic benefits to Panama; a fixed expiration date for United States control of the canal; increased Panamanian participation in the operation and defense of the canal; and continuation of United States participation in defending the canal.⁴⁷

America's experience in Panama is a shining example of diplomatic strength peacefully achieving a national aim. In Panama, America was proactive. American leaders saw the canal coming decades in advance and seized the opportunity to make it their own when the time came. By practicing preemptive diplomacy in the years leading up to the canal's construction, American political elites maximized the United States' gains when the canal became a reality. Parties interested in the geopolitics of the Arctic can emulate America's model in Panama for analogous gain.

⁴⁵ Richard W. van Alstyne, "The Panama Canal: A Classical Case of an Imperial Hangover" *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol. 15, No. 2 (Apr., 1980), 299.

⁴⁶ Arie M. Kacowicz, "The Problem of Peaceful Territorial Change" *International Studies Quarterly* Vol. 38, No. 2 (Jun., 1994), 243.

⁴⁷ Sandra W. Meditz and Dennis M. Hanratty, editors. *Panama: A Country Study*.



Chapter 4

A Campaign too Far: Great Britain Loses the Suez Canal

A study of the Panama Canal showed that successful application of national power resulted in America controlling access to a waterway in a foreign country. Twenty two years after the Panama Canal opened, Great Britain similarly attempted to exercise control over a waterway that exists entirely within a foreign state's territory. Their efforts were not successful. Accordingly, the case of the Suez Canal warrants a similar evaluation. This case is particularly interesting because for many decades the Suez Canal existed peaceably under colonial European administration. When Egyptian nationalist sentiment arose in Cairo and challenged the status quo, Great Britain elected to use military power to resist changes in the region's geostrategic situation. European control of the Suez Canal ended when a Franco-British-Israeli coalition defeated Egypt in the 1956 Suez War.¹ In spite of waging a successful military campaign against Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egyptian nationalist army, the war's outcome included the ejection of European control over the canal. By analyzing the Suez War, it is clear that an exercise of military might can prove inadequate to secure control over a contested line of communication.

By negotiating British administration over the Suez for decades, then failing to keep said control in spite of waging a winning war, Great Britain offered a sobering lesson on how not to exercise control over a strategically important waterway. In this chapter, I will analyze Great Britain's unsuccessful application of national power. Furthermore, I will explore alternative means Great Britain may have used for more successful effect.

¹ Alternatively called the Suez Crisis, Second Arab-Israeli War, the Sinai War, and other monikers in the Arab world, for the purposes of this paper I will refer to the open hostilities between a Franco-British-Israeli coalition versus Nasser's Egypt as the Suez War.

I. History

Dreams of a Canal

Since the time of the Egyptian Pharaohs, there had existed a desire to connect the Mediterranean and Red Seas. Ancient efforts at establishing a canal proved fitful and inconsequential, temporarily pausing for over 1,000 years starting in the eighth century.² Eventually, Egyptian laborers under the direction of European oligarchs completed the modern iteration of the Suez Canal, opening it for traffic in 1858. That event “gave a new impetus to the acquisition of territory in the Red Sea and on its approaches.”³ The canal redefined the political reality in Egypt and Europe. Its construction would bankrupt Egypt,⁴ challenge geostrategic norms, stoke Egyptian nationalism,⁵ and host a decisive chapter of the Cold War’s narrative.

A coveted shortcut built by foreign interests

Like the Panama Canal, the Suez Canal represents a line of communication that came into being through an engineering project designed to expedite shipping traffic. Also like Panama, foreign entities invested deeply in and oversaw construction of the project, while relying heavily on local labor. According to Keith Kyle, the Suez Canal “was constructed by French brains, Egyptian sweat, and the money of both.”⁶ At the helm of the project was de Lesseps, who “was no engineer. De Lesseps had no formal training in engineering, and probably needed none. What was needed to get the project started and completed was an

² J.C.B. Richmond, *Egypt 1798-1952: Her Advance towards a Modern Identity* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1977), 91.

³ Sir Rawson W. Rawson, K.C.M.G., “European Territorial Claims on the Coasts of the Red Sea, and its Southern Approaches, in 1885,” *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography*, New Monthly Series, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Feb., 1885), 106.

⁴ J.C.B. Richmond, *Egypt 1798-1952*, 100-101.

⁵ The decades-long process of constructing and financing the canal nurtured the eventual Egyptian rejection of Ottoman Turk and European dominance of Egyptian governance. For the decisive overtures of November 1876, see J.C.B. Richmond, *Egypt 1798-1952*, 110.

⁶ Keith Kyle, *Suez* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 12.

entrepreneur, a projector of the 'robber barron' variety-and de Lesseps more than met minimum specifications on that score."⁷ Additionally, both projects redefined the geostrategic situation within their respective regions and drew competing national interests to the fore. The Suez Canal provides a shortcut from Europe to Asia, giving whoever controls Egypt a stranglehold on this vital chokepoint. Unlike the Panama Canal, however, those interests in Suez sparked a war and marked a definitive end to foreign control of the canal's host state.⁸ While Egypt's status as a colony of the United Kingdom was officially over by the time of the Suez War, London was loath to relinquish administrative power over the Suez Canal. Under the agreements between Egypt, Great Britain, and France, European control over the canal prior to Nasser's nationalization of it "rather resemble[d] a long-term lease of real property in private law where the lessor retains title."⁹

After the French company that built the Canal failed to define the legal status of the canal and also failed to profit by it, British shareholders stepped in to maintain European control and further London's interests. As Halford L. Hoskins noted, "In November, 1875, the British Government had purchased a large block of Egyptian shares in the Suez Canal Company, less with a view to controlling the operations of the company than to establishing, in the absence of any international agreement, a strong position relative to the defense of that waterway."¹⁰ The era when Great Britain assumed control over the Canal was fraught with war in Europe, and London was wary of the possibility

⁷ Max E. Fletcher's Review of *East and West of Suez: The Suez Canal in History, 1854-1956* by D. A. Farnie <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2116551> accessed 15 Apr 14.

⁸ Although Great Britain had officially relinquished its Protectorate over Egypt by 1922, the widespread, unchallenged presence of British military forces and business interests in Egypt constituted a situation that looked very much like colonialism even up until the time of the Suez War in 1956. See J.C.B. Richmond, *Egypt 1798-1952*, 186.

⁹ Thomas T. F. Huang, "Some International and Legal Aspects of the Suez Canal Question" *The American Journal of International Law* Vol. 51, No. 2 (Apr., 1957), 301.

¹⁰ Halford L. Hoskins, "The Suez Canal as an International Waterway" *The American Journal of International Law* Vol. 37, No. 3 (Jul., 1943), 374.

of widespread unrest threatening Canal operations. Hoskins went on to explain how “The possibility that the Canal might become a zone of hostilities brought into the open the fact that Great Britain already had assumed the role of protector of the Canal.”¹¹ Great Britain saw the expanded geostrategic options afforded by control of the canal as worthy of fighting over, regardless of Egyptian legal claims.

As a literal and figurative path of least resistance for the British Empire’s eastward reach, the Suez Canal was the most expedient avenue for pursuing trade with Asia. The Canal was, in the words of British Prime Minister Anthony Eden, “the swing-door of the British Empire,” offering a front door to Australia, New Zealand and India and a back door to Asia.¹² Eden, along with his French and Israeli cohorts, saw Nasser as a threat to their freedom to use that door. The war represented a miscalculation on the part of Great Britain. By failing to account for the competing interests of Egyptian nationalists, the USSR, and the United States, Great Britain found itself using considerable ways and means in pursuit of unachievable ends.

High value for a geographically foreign entity

Contextually, Egypt and Great Britain in 1956 shared a relationship that does not closely mirror any relationships in the contemporary Arctic region. Still, an understanding of the situation is necessary to appreciate the salient lessons from Britain’s actions in Egypt. Those lessons can provide insight into today’s developments in the navigable Arctic. For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on British actions in Suez, without deep analysis of the complementary French and Israeli roles in the 1956 war. While France’s and Israel’s parts in the Suez War were substantial, they did not dictate British

¹¹ Halford L. Hoskins, “The Suez Canal as an International Waterway,” 374.

¹² Keith Kyle, *Suez*, 1.

actions. The path that led Great Britain to war in Suez began long before 1956 and was not dependent on French or Israeli decisions.

In the World Wars, the canal's importance was not easily overstated. John Keegan observed "the Canal was the most important line of strategic communication in the Allies' war zone," in World War I.¹³ In WWII, British forces fought hard to maintain that line again. Control of North Africa and Egypt was instrumental in ensuring "a favorable supply situation, with the flow of *materiel* [italics in original] from the Indian Ocean," aiding Allied freedom of movement while constraining the Axis.¹⁴ Even as the British Empire's disintegration accelerated during the years following WWII, the habitual and established mode of British international relations continued in resistance to the changing world situation.¹⁵ It took losing the Suez War for London "to put the British New Look into effect by reducing the size of conventional forces, by abandoning national service by 1960 and by placing more reliance on strategic deterrence."¹⁶ By implication, that meant forsaking the centuries-old role of playing imperial master over large swaths of the globe.

The wave of decolonization sweeping the world after WWII had an acute effect on Great Britain. The British Empire's holdings contracted dramatically because of the war; an event foretold before the war "even if Britain proper were to survive."¹⁷ Egypt was an interesting player in the decolonization phenomenon of the era. John Lewis Gaddis wrote, "Egypt had never formally been a colony, but Great Britain had controlled it since the 1880s."¹⁸ In the early post-World War One era, Egypt

¹³ John Keegan, *The First World War*. (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1998), 219.

¹⁴ Jeremy Black, *World War Two* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 124.

¹⁵ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002), 133.

¹⁶ Saki Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez: The Choice Between Europe and the World?* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 23.

¹⁷ Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 141.

¹⁸ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2005), 126.

represented a vestige of Imperial British reach into The Middle East and Africa. As a further benefit, access to Egypt meant access to the Arabian Sea through the Suez Canal. However, the Second World War “led to a marked increase in hostility to the British in Egypt,” reaching a crescendo when Nasser capitalized in nationalizing the Suez Canal.¹⁹ After devoting such massive resources to defending North Africa (particularly Egypt and its canal) against the Axis powers in WWII, Great Britain was loath to relinquish control over that “key part of the ‘informal empire.’”²⁰ Although Great Britain (along with the United States and France) sympathized with Egypt’s legal claims on the Canal as its own national asset per the convention of 1888, London viewed Nasser’s seizure of the canal in 1956 as unlawful.²¹ As the Cold War intensified, new threats to Great Britain compounded her vulnerability to losing colonial possessions. As a matter of prestige as much as practical access to the Suez Canal, Great Britain placed a high value on maintaining power in Egypt prior to the Suez War. From that position, one might see how Great Britain saw its status in Egypt as integral to the interests of the British Empire. Indeed, British policy makers saw that interest as worthy of embarking on a war. Their comprehension of the international context of the day did not match their zeal for launching the Suez War.

II. Great Britain Controls, then Loses the Canal

The year 1956 witnessed a struggle about world order. It witnessed a clash of two world visions: bipolarity versus multi-polarity.

- Ralph Dietl, Suez 1956: A European Intervention?

Before Great Britain was in charge of Egypt

Prior to the Suez War, Egypt had freed itself from Ottoman Turk rule, under which it existed from 1517 until 1798. Following that period,

¹⁹ Jeremy Black, *World War Two*, 286.

²⁰ Jeremy Black, *World War Two*, 286.

²¹ Thomas T. F. Huang, “Some International and Legal Aspects of the Suez Canal Question,” 277-278.

a shifting cast of foreign powers dominated Egypt's politics. They included Napoleonic France from 1798 until 1799, then "a wily ambitious Albanian soldier of fortune" named Mohamed Ali in 1805, and ultimately an increased British dominance that allowed for limited Egyptian self-rule as a British protectorate.²² Great Britain would exercise that domination over Egypt until the Suez War in 1956. Importantly, early 20th century Egypt did not suffer an acrimonious relationship with Great Britain prior to the Suez War. Though perhaps not universally loved, the British presence in Egypt was tolerated without overwhelming overt popular consternation.²³ After centuries of British and French military presence and financial investment in Egypt, European interests were part of the Egyptian cultural landscape by the 1950's. The Egyptian Revolution of 1952 brought Nasser to power and saw the continuation of a close relationship between the Egyptian government and European financial interests. Unlike the past, however, Soviet efforts at exploiting Egypt came in the form of Cold War political machinations in the years leading up to the Suez War. Moscow was no stranger to Egypt but as the Cold War metastasized in the 1950's, the rift between Russia and the West would come to a point of fracture in the Egyptian desert. The Suez War was a logical culmination of external interests coming to a head over the change in Egypt's domestic situation. Geoffrey Warner observed:

The British believed [Nasser's regime] was deliberately seeking to undermine their position throughout the Middle East and Africa; the French were certain that it was aiding and abetting the rebels in Algeria; and the Israelis knew it was organizing [sic] terrorist raids into their territory as well as preventing their shipping from using either the Suez Canal or the Gulf of Aqaba.²⁴

²² Egypt's legal status was convoluted for much of the period, which included an official status as part of the Ottoman Empire during WWI, putting Great Britain in an occupying role during the war. See Peter Woodward, *Nasser* (New York: Longman Group UK Limited, 1992), 4-8.

²³ The giant British military base at Suez had a chilling effect on UK-Egyptian relations. See Keith Kyle, *Suez*.

²⁴ Geoffrey Warner, "Collusion and the Suez Crisis of 1956," *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-) Vol. 55, No. 2 (Apr., 1979), 229.

The Suez War was not the first time Great Britain and France had erroneously evaluated Russia's interests and stakes in Egypt.²⁵ The 1850's saw deep Franco-British involvement in and the beginning construction of the present iteration of the Suez Canal, with Egypt under the rule of the Ottoman Turk Mohammed Sa'id.²⁶ Investment by the European powers increased as the Ottoman Empire retained a slipping, tenuous grasp on Egypt. Finished in 1869, the canal was built by the French, realizing Napoleon's dream of reviving the link between the Mediterranean and Red Seas.²⁷

Like today's increasingly passable arctic sea lines of communication do, opening the Suez Canal represented a previously unavailable means for communication. Great Britain and France were the dominant players in the Canal region from the late 18th century until the Suez War of 1956. Those two European powers saw the region as central to their interests. By cutting transit distances and allowing expedited access to colonial possessions, the promise of a canal across the Isthmus of Suez was central to British and French ambitions in the 1790's.²⁸ While Great Britain initially opposed the French project led by de Lesseps as a matter of realpolitik, London was eager to step in when the French masters of the canal went bankrupt in 1876.²⁹

Accordingly, the British strategy in the Suez was to maintain maximum influence in the face of the change brought by a new international thoroughfare. The other most interested players at the time were Israel, the United States, the USSR, and Egypt. These players each sought realist aims in maximizing their own gains while preventing their competitors from benefitting. After more than a century of wavering support for, opposition against, and eventual control over the Suez

²⁵ J.C.B. Richmond, *Egypt 1798-1952*, 54.

²⁶ J.C.B. Richmond, *Egypt 1798-1952*, 72.

²⁷ J.C.B. Richmond, *Egypt 1798-1952*, 91.

²⁸ Donald Neff, *Warriors at Suez: Eisenhower Takes America into the Middle East* (New York, NY: The Linden Press/Simon & Schuster, 1981), 15.

²⁹ Keith Kyle, *Suez*, 13.

Canal, Great Britain had a vital interest in the canal. Long before 1956, British subjects considered the canal a part of the British Empire, without regard to the actual legal status it held.³⁰ British economic benefit from the canal had become great by the time of the Suez War. Alan B. Mountjoy wrote, "Had there been no disturbance to the Canal's operation it is likely that over 15,000 transits of the Canal would have been recorded in 1956," up from approximately 5,800 annually prior to the Second World War.³¹ Mountjoy went on to note that from the Canal's opening until the World War Two (and beyond, though interpreting shipping usage became increasingly harder due to ships using "flags of convenience"), "in terms of greatest use the Suez Canal was essentially British."³² Concordantly, London's failure to appraise the interests of other players in the region delivered a hard blow to British enterprise.

Britain's missteps in trying to hold on

Great Britain's bungling response to Egypt's nationalization of the Canal offers lessons to avoid such missteps in the Arctic should an analogous situation arise. In the 1956 Suez War, "a short lived but brilliant military success led to a total political defeat" for Great Britain.³³ The Franco-British-Israeli coalition sought the ejection of Nasser and considered war as the most expedient of doing so.³⁴ The alliance was sufficiently potent to dislodge the Egyptian military's seizure of the Canal, but the diplomatic pressure exerted by American and Soviet leaders ended the long-term European hold on it.³⁵ Britain's failure to

³⁰ Keith Kyle, *Suez*, 14.

³¹ Alan B. Mountjoy, "The Suez Canal at Mid-Century," *Economic Geography* Vol. 34, No. 2 (Apr., 1958), 155.

³² Alan B. Mountjoy, "The Suez Canal at Mid-Century," 156.

³³ André Beaufre, *The Suez Expedition 1956*, translated from the French by Richard Barry, (New York, NY: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969), 14.

³⁴ Ralph Dietl, "Suez 1956: A European Intervention?" *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol. 43, No. 2 (Apr., 2008), 268-269.

³⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 127-8.

secure a commitment from America in the war vitiated British efforts to maintain control of the line of communication through force of arms. That, compounded by Britain's misreading of Soviet desire and commitment to bolstering Moscow's influence in the Middle East, set the stage for a showdown between superpowers that made the military reality on the ground in Egypt largely irrelevant. As a result, Egypt was able to prevent Great Britain and France from enjoying unfettered maritime access to the Canal and beyond. Egypt was able to do so even while suffering a military defeat on its own soil. If Great Britain and France had better prepared their diplomatic position prior to the 1956 war, they would have been in a stronger position to preserve the regional status quo. To understand how France and Great Britain came to build, and subsequently lose, their dominance over the canal it is necessary to explore the antecedent relevant geopolitical events.

Missed clues about Egyptian Nationalism

Just as Great Britain misread Soviet resolve in Egypt, so too did it fail to grasp the import of working with "Egypt's first indigenous ruler for 2,000 years."³⁶ Nasser was keen to establish a Pan-Arab state and he understood that ejecting European influence from Egypt was a prerequisite for his grander designs.³⁷ In Egypt's 1952 revolution, Nasser consolidated power by capitalizing on nationalist sentiment, created in part by the high price in lives that Egypt paid in the Suez Canal's construction.³⁸ By the time he nationalized the canal in 1956, he consolidated his position by drawing on the national outrage brought

³⁶ Peter Woodward, *Nasser*, 68.

³⁷ Peter Woodward, *Nasser*, 62.

³⁸ According to the BBC, Nasser "said 120,000 Egyptians had died building the canal but Egypt was receiving just a tiny proportion of the company's £35m annual earnings." See BBC page http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/july/26/newsid_2701000/2701603.stm. Alternatively, Keith Kyle points out that Nasser's figure may have been a mistaken reference to Greek Historian Herodotus's account of "a rather earlier canal." See Keith Kyle, *Suez*, 134.

on by the US reneging on its commitment to build the Aswan Dam.³⁹ The USSR offered to be a benefactor of sorts for Nasser's regime since both parties sought the marginalization of Western influence in Egypt and the larger Middle East.⁴⁰ Nasser may not have had a close alignment of agendas with Moscow but for a shared quest to rid the region of Western troops, money and power.⁴¹ He proved a shrewd statesman by "exploit[ing] the hopes held among leaders in both Washington and Moscow that they might bring him within their respective spheres of influence."⁴² With the great menu of options that Great Britain enjoyed thanks to unfettered access to the Canal, London would not casually abandon its place in the power structure of Egyptian geopolitics.

Great Britain relied on access to the Suez Canal for its petroleum needs. The effect resonated throughout the British economy. "With fifty-one percent of its shares owned by the British Government," The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company relied on the canal for access to quench Europe's "addictive thirst" for oil.⁴³ By 1951, the canal was "becoming a virtual adjunct of the oil industry."⁴⁴ For this reason, the canal was of great import to the British economy and military. When Persia nationalized its oil and the Persian Prime Minister Mohamed Mossadeq traveled to Egypt in a symbolic gesture of allied anti-colonialism, the British leadership reacted with alarm⁴⁵ (MI6 in conjunction with the CIA later deposed Mossadeq⁴⁶). Accordingly, it is unsurprising that London reacted to Nasser's nationalization in a way that mirrored previous efforts to limit

³⁹ Peter Woodward, *Nasser*, 46-49.

⁴⁰ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 127.

⁴¹ Keith Kyle, *Suez*, 224-225.

⁴² John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 127.

⁴³ Keith Kyle, *Suez*, 7.

⁴⁴ Keith Kyle, *Suez*, 7.

⁴⁵ Keith Kyle, *Suez*, 7-8.

⁴⁶ Michael T. Thornhill, "Britain, the United States and the Rise of an Egyptian Leader: The Politics and Diplomacy of Nasser's Consolidation of Power, 1952-4," *The English Historical Review* Vol. 119, No. 483 (Sep., 2004), 910.

uncertainty in the region. Restrictions on the oil flowing from the Middle East through the Canal would alter Britain's way of life; 65% of Britain's oil came from the Arab World.⁴⁷ By any estimation, losing the Suez Canal was an economic hardship for Great Britain. As an illustration, years after the Suez War, Egypt's temporary closing of the Canal to British traffic contributed to a sudden 14% drop in the British Pound sterling.⁴⁸ Had London retained its control over the Canal, the British Pound would not be beholden to Egyptian whim.

If Great Britain failed to secure her interests properly in the Suez Canal, it was not for want of military might. The quick and militarily decisive war of 1956 proved that. Instead, Great Britain, like France, failed to grasp the totality of the international attitudes on the canal's status. Growing Egyptian nationalism was a factor London overlooked when pursuing a strategy for maintaining control over the Canal. When Nasser took charge in 1952, he made no secret of his nationalistic designs.⁴⁹ While Great Britain struggled to maintain its influence in world politics, Nasser pushed Egypt away from the west. With the opportunistic international relationships so common in the Cold War, the USSR saw political inroads in Egypt. In the political machinations leading toward the 1956 war, "Russia's actions aimed primarily at furthering its own interests that did not always coincide with those of Cairo."⁵⁰ If Great Britain and France had better estimated the opportunity for the USSR to strengthen Egypt's growing anti-western sentiment, they could have pursued a more diplomatic course of action with the Egyptian malcontents, avoiding the 1956 war. Instead, by failing to address the popular anger, which had built over the course of

⁴⁷ Saki Dockrill, Britain's Retreat from East of Suez, 125-126.

⁴⁸ Saki Dockrill, Britain's Retreat from East of Suez, 199.

⁴⁹ Nasser started his time in power without "a clear idea of the policy to be pursued, provided that it continued the throwing off of foreign domination and the restoration of Egypt's dignity." See Peter Woodward, *Nasser*, 40.

⁵⁰ O. M. Smolansky, "Moscow and the Suez Crisis: 1956, A Reappraisal" *Political Science Quarterly* Vol. 80, No. 4 (Dec., 1965), 583.

the canal's construction, Great Britain set the stage for Soviet political interlopers to strengthen the political fragmentation that ultimately led to war.

The superpowers cast the deciding votes in the Suez War

Nasser nurtured an increasingly convivial relationship with the USSR in the years preceding the Suez War.⁵¹ Without Soviet backing, the Egyptian nationalist cause would have been unlikely to choose armed action against Great Britain and France, as well as Israel.⁵² With support from the USSR, Egypt possessed the arms (of Soviet origin procured via Czechoslovakia⁵³) and sufficient international backing to engage in a war that, even if militarily unsuccessful, could end the legitimacy of European control over the canal. In a rare Cold War show of shared interests between the United States and USSR, both superpowers submitted resolutions to the United Nations in an effort to calm the situation in the Canal Zone after Israel attacked Nasser's forces there.⁵⁴ France and Great Britain vetoed the resolutions, and London sent Nasser an ultimatum to withdraw his forces from the Canal Zone. Nasser understood the implication that if he did not vacate the theater, the European coalition would do it for him. He refused, and the war commenced shortly thereafter.⁵⁵

This is important because even in the face of a better-armed and equipped host of foes, Nasser did not need to fear a crushing defeat; he was confident that the superpowers would not risk a nuclear exchange over Egypt.⁵⁶ The gamble paid off, thanks in large part because the

⁵¹ Erica Schoenberger and Stephanie Reich, "Soviet Policy in the Middle East" *MERIP Reports* No. 39 (Jul., 1975), 11-12.

⁵² John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 127-8.

⁵³ Saki Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez*, 23, and Erica Schoenberger and Stephanie Reich, "Soviet Policy in the Middle East," 11.

⁵⁴ Donald Neff, *Warriors at Suez*, 377-378.

⁵⁵ Donald Neff, *Warriors at Suez*, 378-379.

⁵⁶ Peter Woodward, *Nasser*, 52-53.

Soviet support for the Egyptian cause was not matched by American support for Nasser's foes. To point, American statesmen were not averse to the concept of Egypt peacefully nationalizing the canal.⁵⁷ In a fatal misstep, the Franco-British-Israeli party "seized the Suez Canal in an abortive effort to overthrow the anti-colonial Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser," but did so "without informing the Americans."⁵⁸ Excluding American support from British efforts was no accident. Prime Minister Eden told his cabinet in 1955 that the British "should not allow themselves to be restricted overmuch by reluctance to act without full American concurrence and support."⁵⁹

The diplomatic environment set the United States in a precarious position vis-à-vis Egypt's aggressive stance. Without a clearly articulated stake in exercised ownership and administration of the Suez Canal, Washington did not consider the issue to be worthy of war with the USSR. Context informed the American position; the Korean War was less than four years distant. In that unpopular war, America fought Soviet-backed indigenous troops for an end state that appeared opaque to the American populous. The specter of a nuclear exchange with the USSR remained at the forefront of that conflict. There is no evidence that American policy makers advocated for insertion into another war that would see US forces fighting against a Soviet-supplied enemy. Furthermore, defending European control over a part of the Middle East was not a priority of the Eisenhower administration.⁶⁰ Those factors, when coupled with the increased risk of nuclear war that any such campaign would bring, make it easy to see that a cost-benefit analysis of American intervention in the conflict would prove unappetizing to Washington. Moreover, the situation in Hungary was degenerating into

⁵⁷ Benjamin Nimer, "Dulles, Suez, and Democratic Diplomacy" *The Western Political Quarterly* Vol. 12, No. 3 (Sep., 1959), 795.

⁵⁸ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 70.

⁵⁹ Kieth Kyle, *Suez*, 40.

⁶⁰ Donald Neff, *Warriors at Suez*, 35-36.

war, threatening Soviet-backed communist expansion in Europe – a development that overshadowed timely CIA intelligence revealing Israeli, French, and British mobilizations to attack Egypt.⁶¹ As Great Britain and France strengthened their partnership and resolve leading up to their joint campaign against Nasser, they lamented America's refusal to take stronger actions against the blossoming Soviet-Egyptian coalition.⁶² The American commitment to Europe was strong and demonstrable in 1956, but the American commitment was not without limit, and the limit did not extend to British aims in the Suez Crisis, particularly in light of the developing events in Hungary at the time. In the emerging bipolar world of the Cold War, the Suez War was a strong indicator of crises to come. Those conflicts that saw an uneven investment by one side of the US-USSR divide were likely to end unfavorably for the side lacking robust support from a superpower. While it was true that "The Suez Canal crisis contributed greatly towards the cementing of the relationship between Egypt and the Soviet Union," the same effect did not manifest in the US-European relationship.⁶³

III. So What

Might does not guarantee a right

The example of Great Britain failing to comprehend the Egyptian situation in early 20th century Egypt remains valuable. British elites were direct with regard to their treatment of the Suez issue. Indeed, "during the crisis the British leaders did not use euphemisms among themselves. Ultimatum, pretext, collusion, all were at times employed."⁶⁴ Writing at the time of the war, Elisabeth Monroe of *The Economist* observed, "To attack Egypt against the reasoned urging of the world, and under cover of a smoke-screen of obfuscatory statements, can arouse no

⁶¹ Donald Neff, *Warriors at Suez*, 353-354.

⁶² Keith Kyle, *Suez*, 260.

⁶³ Erica Schoenberger and Stephanie Reich, "Soviet Policy in the Middle East," 12.

⁶⁴ Keith Kyle, *Suez*, 153.

confident support in the country.”⁶⁵ Just because London had the means to punish Nasser did not make their cause well thought out, much less achievable. The Suez War points to a reality that should not be ignored: when the national interests of seemingly disparate actors match to oppose the status quo, simple strength of arms can be rendered irrelevant. While there is limited value in exploring “what if” scenarios that might stoke nationalist flames or upset the regional power balance, it is important to frame present potential problems such that the lessons of the past do not disappear.⁶⁶ The United States can avoid a similar situation in the Arctic by accurately taking stock of who might back whom in an effort to counter American might in the region.

Just as the militarization of the space environment vitiated the concept of innocent passage in that commons,⁶⁷ the armed adventures in the Suez Canal proved that realist national interests trump goodwill and cooperation. Great Britain, France, Egypt and the USSR provided an example par excellence of realpolitik in their efforts to exert influence in the Suez Canal.

A Host of Bad Options

What could the UK have done differently in their quest to hold the Suez Canal? Ostensibly, London chose the most direct and perceived lowest cost course of action in fighting Egypt. War to depose Nasser was not Great Britain’s primary design for its dealings with Egypt. At the time, “Britain's main concerns in the Middle East included prevention of Russian interference, the safeguarding of the Suez Canal which handled a large amount of British and other Western marine traffic, and maintenance of a secure oil supply from the Middle East.”⁶⁸ Addressing

⁶⁵ *The Economist*, “Splenic Isolation,” 3 November 1956.

⁶⁶ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 217.

⁶⁷ Air University, AU-18: *Space Primer*, 35.

⁶⁸ Michael C. Shupe, William M. Wright, Keith W. Hipel and Niall M. Fraser, “Nationalization of the Suez Canal: A Hypergame Analysis,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* Vol. 24, No. 3 (Sep., 1980), 478.

such concerns hardly required a surprise invasion of Egypt. British leaders could have entered negotiations to turn over canal operations to Nasser's government.⁶⁹ However, if Great Britain had elected outright not to contest Egyptian nationalization, they would have wholly lost their control of the canal.⁷⁰ In place of seeing the situation in the terms of a zero-sum equation, Great Britain could have pursued a mutually beneficial compromise with Nasser. Instead, it chose war.

By forming a coalition with France and Israel, British decision makers built an interested group with ostensible international legitimacy. That action prevented the appearance of Great Britain acting alone in attempting to maintain the status quo. If they had acted alone, the perception of a world power (modern history's preeminent colonial power, no less) bullying a lesser state in its own territory would have made Great Britain an easy target for condemnation. That would have been particularly stinging during an era of widespread decolonization. While "the United Nations participated in the conflict as a mediator, trying to reduce the level of violence and separate the combatants," their efforts were not decisive on the scope, conduct, or outcome of the war.⁷¹ By roping in allies to challenge Egyptian efforts at nationalization, London sought to preclude the negative press that would have come with their ostensibly colonial action. Of course, Nasser created a coalition of sorts as well.

When the USSR pledged its support for Egypt in the Suez Crisis it countered the effect London achieved by internationalizing the conflict. That effect, however, did not cross the Atlantic. The early Cold War

⁶⁹ Previous agreements between Egyptian and European parties spelled out legal definitions of ownership over the canal and its operation in 1864, 1866 and 1883, among earlier accords, clarified Egypt's rights and claims to the canal with regard to parallel European claims within the auspices of accepted international law. Continuation of those agreements might have delayed or prevented French and British impetuses for war. See Thomas T. F. Huang, "Some International and Legal Aspects of the Suez Canal Question" 277-278, 286-287 and 300.

⁷⁰ O. M. Smolansky "Moscow and the Suez Crisis," 581-582.

⁷¹ Randolph M. Siverson. "A Research Note on Cognitive Balance and International Conflict: Egypt and Israel in the Suez Crisis" *The Western Political Quarterly* Vol. 27, No. 2 (Jun., 1974), 328.

political climate in the United States was not isolationist, but included a high hurdle for American involvement. As Robert Jervis pointed out:

American aid, even in Europe, was to be given only when it constituted the "missing component"-when the country had almost all the elements needed to stave off the Communist threat and limited U.S. assistance could make the difference between success and failure. Given the tight budgetary restrictions, the United States' role had to be very limited. Thus, only a few cases could qualify, and even areas of strategic value were not to be contested unless the circumstances were propitious.⁷²

By Jervis's definition, Suez did not qualify for American intervention at the time.

If Great Britain had more accurately gauged American commitment to their cause or their own capability to wage a war against a Soviet-backed Egypt, they could have embarked on their campaign from a better-informed position. Since London accomplished neither of those, it doomed itself to fighting a war that would bring swift victory on the battlefield and simultaneously failed to achieve the peace it desired. As Beaufre noted, "unless [a war] can be a total victory on a world scale...such an operation ha[s] no prospect of success, if not carried out against a favourable political background."⁷³ He went on to agree with the spirit of Clausewitz's argument, asserting that military efforts must, above all, support political aims in order to achieve the desired ends.⁷⁴ If British leadership had insisted on publicly announced American backing prior to fighting Nasser's forces, Russia would likely have less readily pledged its support to the Egyptian cause. Instead, Great Britain led a charge into quagmire, ignoring the reality of the world's political climate. Per Gaddis, the British handling of the situation in Suez was "ill-conceived, badly timed, and incompetently managed," and "almost broke

⁷² Robert Jervis, "The Impact of the Korean War on the Cold War" *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* Vol. 24, No. 4 (Dec., 1980), 574.

⁷³ André Beaufre, *The Suez Expedition*, 1956, 143.

⁷⁴ André Beaufre, *The Suez Expedition*, 1956, 143 and Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, 606-608.

up the NATO alliance.”⁷⁵ For want of scrutinizing the geostrategic situation more thoroughly, London plunged into a doomed conflict of its own creation.

Another area in which Great Britain could have better prepped the diplomatic battlefield would have been by creating an alternate international narrative. London should have showed the world and the Russians that British control of the canal was in everyone’s best interests.

Conclusion

It may be that broad trends, such as the triumph of notions of progress, the decline of the Ottoman empire [sic], the advance of mechanization and the emergence of international capital markets, made the construction of the canal inevitable.

-The Economist, June 12th, 2003

If the Suez Canal itself was an inevitable phenomenon, Great Britain’s loss of control over it was not.⁷⁶ In summary, Great Britain and France devoted over a century of military, political and diplomatic investment into furthering their causes in Egypt but lost control in 1956. That loss may not have been preventable in perpetuity, but it did not have to end with the conclusion of the Suez War. Andre Beaufre, who commanded French units in the war, pointed out that the Suez War merits deliberate reflection. He wrote, “a political defeat as the outcome of a victorious military action raises a problem of the first importance.”⁷⁷ His words should give pause to anyone who assumes that a preponderance of military might in the Arctic will automatically translate into unchallenged dominance of the region. Just as Canada and Russia today claim “ownership” of various Arctic shipping lanes, so too did Europe’s powers assert claims over the Suez Canal in the decades

⁷⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 127.

⁷⁶ *The Economist*, “A Cut in the Dunes,” 12 June 2003.

⁷⁷ André Beaufre, *The Suez Expedition*, 15.

leading up to 1956. They financed the canal, propped up friendly regimes, and fought a winning war to maintain their assets. Still, their efforts were ultimately fruitless given both the American and Soviet governments hostile response to the Franco-British-Israeli coalition.⁷⁸ The Suez War was a referendum on the Cold War world and the result was bipolarity: Europe was not to play an equal part in the US-USSR struggle.⁷⁹ Had the United Kingdom and France grasped that fact, they would not have been forced to relinquish control over the Suez Canal in the manner they did. While the context of the Suez War is only tangentially analogous to the current state of affairs in the Arctic, analysis of regional stakeholders' interests is beneficial in any situation whereby a new line of communication promises profitability and an expanded menu of policy options. Great Britain saw the profit and geostrategic options that came with controlling the Suez Canal, and fought to keep control.

Suez was not an unmitigated disaster for the United Kingdom. While the war forced British acceptance "that the end of the empire was at hand," it did not destroy Great Britain.⁸⁰ It was clear that "political and economic realities in the aftermath of World War II rendered Britain's global contraction inevitable."⁸¹ However, since Egypt was not officially a colony, Great Britain might have used different means to retain her economic interests in Egypt without war. Although it was a miscarriage of British foreign policy in that it failed to achieve its purpose, the Suez War led London to reevaluate Great Britain's position in the world's balance of power. After Suez, British leaders grasped the reality that their national wellbeing depended on a strong partnership

⁷⁸ O. M. Smolansky "Moscow and the Suez Crisis," 589 and John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 127.

⁷⁹ Ralph Dietl, "Suez 1956: A European Intervention?" 277.

⁸⁰ Peter Woodward, *Nasser*, 54.

⁸¹ James Gump's review of Saki Dockrill. *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez: The Choice Between Europe and the World?* <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=7023> accessed 15 Apr 14.

with the United States.⁸² Indeed, British leadership came to terms with the reality that after Suez, Great Britain “could never again resort to military action, outside British territories, without at least American acquiescence.”⁸³ That lesson is important because it showed that while Great Britain and her coalition allies, France and Israel, had the ability to deal defeat to their foe on the battlefield, without the political and economic support of Washington, combat superiority did not translate into geopolitical victory. As Krozewski noted, “After Suez, [British] policy was reappraised and co-ordinated [sic] more closely with the US.”⁸⁴ Furthermore, the debacle “strengthened [British] determination to pursue its independent nuclear status.”⁸⁵ The Suez War revealed a world geopolitical environment dominated by two superpowers, whereby everyone else would have to pick a side or risk irrelevance and drastically limited political options.

In the Arctic, states are currently seeking to maximize their geostrategic options. To conclude this paper, I will turn to specific recommendations for how the United States, Canada, and NATO might realize beneficial ends through using the means at their disposal.

⁸² Gerold Krozewski “Sterling, the 'Minor' Territories, and the End of Formal Empire, 1939-1958” *The Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 46, No. 2 (May, 1993), 253.

⁸³ Quotation of British Prime Minister Eden’s personal secretary Guy Millard, in Anthony Adamthwaite, “Suez Revisited” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* Vol. 64, No. 3 (Summer, 1988), 449.

⁸⁴ Gerold Krozewski “Sterling, the 'Minor' Territories, and the End of Formal Empire, 1939-1958,” 260.

⁸⁵ Saki Dockrill. *Britain’s Retreat from East of Suez*, 23.

Chapter 5

Conclusions: Where to place the Diplomacy/Military Fulcrum in the 21st Century Arctic

[A]s Hellas became more powerful and as the importance of acquiring money became more and more evident, tyrannies were established in nearly all the cities, revenues increased, shipbuilding flourished, and ambition turned toward sea-power.

-Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War

The Panama and Suez Canals are more than simply navigational chokepoints. They are symbols of national will and demonstrated geostrategic hotspots. Unlike established nautical chokepoints such as the Malacca Straits, Gibraltar, the Bosphorus, Cape Horn and other open-sea waterways, the navigable Arctic will come into being as a new entity and one without definitive legal status. Indeed, the “same geophysical changes that are spurring increased interest in the region are making it all the more difficult for Arctic stakeholders to designate specific points in Arctic space as either definitively ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ state territory.”¹ Further differentiating the Arctic from other navigational phenomena, a melting Arctic represents what Rosen described as “a structural change in the security environment.”² It does so by bringing world powers into increased interaction in a region where they currently have relatively little. The United States, Canada, China and Russia should undertake proactive measures to prevent inadvertent hostilities, environmental degradation, and legal uncertainties as they refine their Arctic agendas. Additionally, they should endeavor to preserve a clearly delineated picture of national sovereignty in the changing Arctic. Lest the Arctic end up as a modern-day Isthmus of Corinth and host the outbreak of a

¹ Gerhardt, Hannes, et al. "Contested Sovereignty in a Changing Arctic." *Annals Of The Association Of American Geographers* 100, no. 4 (October 2010): 999.

² Stephen Peter Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 251.

major war, Arctic stakeholders must temper their thirst for riches and prevent a bellicose metastasis of sea power in the Arctic.³

In this concluding chapter, I will outline recommendations for the United States, Canada, and NATO as they might seek to exploit the changing situation in the Arctic. While there are unlimited possible outcomes in the changing Arctic, I contend that any forward-looking strategy should address three contingencies. First, strategists should consider the effects of no environmental change in the Arctic from the present physiognomy. While science indicates such a scenario to be unlikely, statesmen and military leaders must consider how to address the status quo while eyeing methods of forwarding their interests when no change is afoot. Second, if slow change characterizes environmental changes in the Arctic, successful strategies will budget for a steadily evolving situation which offers time to assess and react without immediacy. Last, if a drastic, sudden change happens in the Arctic, those states with a ready plan will be better suited to meet any challenges as compared to states that have to start from a dead stop. My following recommendations are not specific to each type of change, since it is impractical to try to predict the future, but rather offer suggestions that might fit in any of the three possible scenarios for Arctic change.

The goal of my analysis conforms to Peter Schwartz's ideas of considering scenarios; I seek "not a more accurate picture of tomorrow but better decisions about the future" through this analysis.⁴ By deliberately endeavoring to prevent conflict and consternation in the Arctic, America, Canada, China, and Russia can forestall or prevent the undesired events that befell the Suez Canal while drawing on the successful lessons of the Panama Canal. Borgerson observed in *Foreign Affairs* "the Arctic countries have also begun making remarkably

³ Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* (New York, NY: Penguin, 1972), 43.

⁴ Peter Schwartz, *The Art of the Long View: Planning for the Future in an Uncertain World* (New York: Crown Business, 1996), 9.

concerted efforts to cooperate, rather than fight, as the region opens up, settling old boundary disputes peacefully and letting international law guide their behavior.”⁵ His findings support the assumption that while states seek to balance power in the Arctic, it is likely that they will experiment with strategies designed to maximize benefits with the lowest level of energy expenditure. It is important to acknowledge that although states may endeavor to advance their interests peacefully, the possibility of conflict should not be ignored. The following observations draw on historical precedent and accepted norms of international relations.

Canada

Canada’s leaders have voiced concerns over a perceived threat to national sovereignty in the Arctic. They have similarly voiced anxiety with regard to the status of the Northwest Passage. Ottawa can address both issues by increasing Canada’s armed presence in the Arctic. Revitalization efforts at the Nanisivik naval facility and the Arctic Training Center are positive steps toward bolstering Canada’s defense posture in the Arctic.⁶ Ottawa should continue preparing for an increased military presence in Canada’s far north. Doing so in concert with American forces through exercises and partnerships will increase Canada’s options should they need to use force in defense of Canada’s interests.

Additionally, Canadian diplomats should fight for amendments to the UNCLOS such that they rectify any insecurity concerning the Northwest Passage. Should Canada fail to achieve their desired changes to the document, an increased investment in patrol presence should allay anxiety while discouraging activity inimical to Canada’s interests.

⁵ Scott Borgerson, “The Coming Arctic Boom,” *Foreign Affairs* 92.4 (2013): 76-89.

⁶ Michael Byers, “Time to negotiate the Northwest Passage with the United States” *Policy Options*, October 2011, 69.

Continue Exercising Arctic Sovereignty

The government in Ottawa needs to invest further in exercises like Trillium Response.⁷ Doing so will serve two purposes. First, maneuvers in the far northern reaches of Canada will increase the credibility and experience of Canadian military forces. Operating in so harsh an environment as the Arctic demands a specific skillset and specialized equipment distinct from what is needed to conduct operations in other, more permissive environments. Additional Arctic exercises will bolster the competence of Canada's forces as they increase their presence in the north. That will provide Ottawa more options in the event that a kinetic military response becomes necessary. Secondly but no less important, Canada's exercises in the Arctic will serve notice to any would-be interlopers, be they commercial shipping vessels or foreign-sponsored activities with nefarious intent. That notice will come in the form of an armed Canadian presence with the effect of making hostile actors think twice before taking liberties within Canada's territory.

It is critical that Canada and the United States train for coalition operations in Canada's north. Shared interests in the Arctic define the US/Canadian relationship and with American forces already present in Alaska, both states can benefit by preparing to meet any challenges to Canada's sovereignty in a joint manner. Preparing a credible capability to operate in the Arctic will increase Canada's ability to address threats to Canadian interests, both nautical and terrestrial. In 2007, Canadian Prime Minister Steven Harper captured that sentiment when he remarked, "Canada has a choice when it comes to defending our sovereignty in the Arctic. Either we use it or we lose it."⁸

⁷ Canadian Army, "Exercise TRILLIUM RESPONSE" <http://www.army-armee.forces.gc.ca/en/exercises-2013/ex-trillium-response.page> accessed 5 May 5, 2014.

⁸ Michael Byers, "Time to negotiate the Northwest Passage with the United States," 69.

UNCLOS and Canada/US relations

Canada needs to define its place in the Arctic within the context of the UNCLOS and particularly regarding the Northwest Passage. Unilaterally affixing “Canadian” to the waterway’s name, which Canada’s House of Commons did in 2009, will do little to forward Ottawa’s interests and security in the Canadian Arctic.⁹ The melting ice in Canada’s northern littoral is an identified vulnerability to Canadian security.¹⁰ If Canadian decision makers are unhappy with the current state of affairs as enabled by the UNCLOS, they should strive to amend the UNCLOS or withdraw from it. This is a salient point as the ice melts, opening access to northern Canada. Without a clear, legal delineation of what constitutes Canadian territory and exclusive economic zones, Canada stand to lose potential revenue from commercial activity. As the icebound Canadian archipelago opens to resource extraction, Canada should position its industry to exploit the opportunities. Doing so will strengthen the Canadian economy.

In their March 2014 policy brief, *Offshore Oil and Gas Governance in the Arctic, A Leadership Role for the U.S.*, Brookings Institute scholars Charles Ebinger, Alisa Schackmann, and John P. Banks outline specific recommendations for Canada addressing its international dealings within the Arctic. Of note, they recommend Canada and the US engage diplomatically “in strengthening the localized regulatory framework specific to their shared marine environments,” specifically since “Canada is preparing for more exploration in the Beaufort Sea” which abuts American territory.¹¹ Doing so would offer Canada and the US an opportunity to tackle one of the “bite size” issues

⁹ Ana-Maria Ghimis. "Rim Versus Non-Rim States in the Arctic Region: Prospects for a Zero-Sum Game Or a Win-Win One?" *Romanian Journal of European Affairs* 13, no. 3 (09, 2013): 40.

¹⁰ Jeremiah Cushman, “Canadian Sovereignty In The Arctic: The military ramifications of Ottawa's claims,” *Military Periscope*, 26 April 2007.

¹¹ Ebinger et. al., “Offshore Oil and Gas Governance in the Arctic, A Leadership Role for the U.S.,” 53.

they share, opening the door and laying the foundation to negotiations addressing matters of increased gravity.¹²

The United States

We will also partner with Canada on regional security issues such as an evolving Arctic...
-2011 National Military Strategy of the United States of America

The provisions of the President's 2013 National Strategy for the Arctic Region are ambitious and offer a sound basis for where American Arctic policy should focus. Still, more than a year after President Obama's sweeping declarations concerning America's Arctic policies, the US government has implemented few of his visions. The DoD's matching document which followed the President's strategy is also a solid policy framework from which to build. The challenge today lies in translating hopes, wishes, and proclamations about America's Arctic interests into action. The evidence of a rapidly changing context in the Arctic is legion, and American action is not keeping pace with those changes.

2013 Strategies for the Arctic – a Good Start

In his 2013 document, President Obama averred that America's Arctic strategy hinges "on three lines of effort."¹³ Advancing American security interests, pursuing responsible Arctic region stewardship and strengthening international cooperation are the three priorities in the President's strategy.¹⁴ His plan is ambitious in concept but fails to provide the "how" for many of the document's notions. Accordingly, the National Strategy for the Arctic falls victim to what Richard P. Rumelt terms "bad strategy." By simply stating wishes, goals, and desires with

¹² Ebinger et. al., "Offshore Oil and Gas Governance in the Arctic, A Leadership Role for the U.S.," 53.

¹³ The White House, "National Strategy for the Arctic Region."

¹⁴ The White House, "National Strategy for the Arctic Region," 2.

scant guidance, the document meanders into practical irrelevance.¹⁵ Encouragingly, O'Rourke noted "On January 30, 2014, the Obama Administration released an implementation plan for the May 2013 National Strategy for the Arctic region."¹⁶ Continued direction from the President's administration will further increase the sentiment that America's Arctic policy is a priority.

In contrast, the DoD's Arctic Strategy does call for specific actions. For instance, it states,

Priority will be given to addressing key near-term challenges primarily in key enablers, including: shortfalls in ice and weather reporting and forecasting; limitations in C4ISR due to lack of assets and harsh environmental conditions; and limited domain awareness. The key will be to address needs over time as activity in the Arctic increases, while balancing potential Arctic investments with other national priorities.¹⁷

That type of concrete recommendation is important if American decision makers are to direct efforts toward a specified end in the Arctic. The DoD's Arctic Strategy fits neatly with the President's vision. Both documents stress how it is vital to American interests that US instruments of power nurture cooperation in the Arctic.

It is important to recognize that repeatedly calling for increased international cooperation in the Arctic does not guarantee that America's rivals for influence in the region will agree. While it is arguably in all Arctic stakeholders' best interest to seek the "peaceful resolution of disputes without coercion,"¹⁸ American policy should not rest on that assumption. In light of NATO's public declaration that it plans no additional presence in the Arctic in spite of the increases in commercial and Russian military activity there, American strategy should plan for

¹⁵ Richard P. Rumelt, *Good Strategy/Bad Strategy: The Difference and Why it Matters* (New York: Crown, 2011), 32-34.

¹⁶ Ronald O'Rourke, "Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress," 9.

¹⁷ The Pentagon, "Department of Defense Arctic Strategy," 14.

¹⁸ The White House, "National Strategy for the Arctic Region," 4.

joint US/Canadian efforts to countering activity hostile to American and Canadian interests in the Arctic.¹⁹ Also, Washington should prepare to implement pre-developed plans if NATO changes the character of its Arctic stance and advocates for increased military presence in the region. A policy that assumes other states will adhere to Washington's vision – instead of promoting capabilities to address states and activities that do not – will fail to advance American security interests.

With regard to President Obama's second priority of responsible stewardship in Arctic region,²⁰ he recognizes how "[a]n undisciplined approach to exploring new opportunities in [the Arctic] could result in significant harm to the region, to our national security interests, and to the global good."²¹ Again, the President's strategy promulgates an admirable goal but fails to address how America can forward that goal in a specific way.

Ratify the UNCLOS

The 2013 Arctic strategy pushes the importance of the President's third line of effort to "strengthen international cooperation."²² On this point, the President's recommendation is clear and ostensibly feasible. He specifically recommends American accession to the UNCLOS.²³ The DoD's Arctic Strategy similarly asserts that the Department "will continue to support U.S. accession to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea."²⁴ The President's document rightly points out that as the only member of the Arctic Council that is not a signatory to the UNCLOS, America is unable to "maximize legal certainty and best secure international recognition of our rights."²⁵ That point is salient for two

¹⁹ Gerard O'Dwyer, "NATO Rejects Direct Arctic Presence," *Defense News*, 29 May 2013.

²⁰ The White House, "National Strategy for the Arctic Region," 7.

²¹ The White House, "National Strategy for the Arctic Region," 4.

²² The White House, "National Strategy for the Arctic Region," 8.

²³ The White House, "National Strategy for the Arctic Region," 9.

²⁴ The Pentagon, "Department of Defense Arctic Strategy," 10.

²⁵ The White House, "National Strategy for the Arctic Region," 8.

reasons. First, any agreement the members of the Arctic Council make under the auspices of the UNCLOS will be problematic for the United States from a legal standpoint. Any legal agreement hostile to American interests will leave America's diplomatic instrument of power less capable to confront the challenge, forcing negotiations outside legal channels used by UNCLOS signatory states. That decreases certainty by putting America on an unequal legal footing with respect to other Arctic states. Accordingly, being a non-signatory to the UNCLOS blunts America's diplomatic instrument of power for want of operating on a level playing field in the international legal sense. By ratifying UNCLOS America can take a positive step toward advancing American interests in the Arctic. Indeed, Borgerson observes,

While the rest of the world has already awoken to the region's growing importance, the United States still seems fast asleep, leaving the playing field open to more competitive rivals... The first and most obvious place for the United States to start is to finally join the 164 other countries that have acceded to UNCLOS.²⁶

From the DoD's point of view, the UNCLOS can help it execute its duties of protecting American security in the Arctic. Per the Arctic Strategy, the UNCLOS "codifies the rights, freedoms, and uses of the sea and airspace the Department seeks to preserve; provides a means for the peaceful resolution of disputes; and ensures international recognition of resources rights on the extended continental shelf."²⁷ The President and Secretary of Defense make a reasoned argument for the ratification of the UNCLOS. While doing so could possibly invite challenges America's sovereignty in the region, a robust and ready American military presence will suffice to protect America's Arctic interests.

²⁶ Scott Borgerson, "The Coming Arctic Boom," 76-89.

²⁷ The Pentagon, "Department of Defense Arctic Strategy," 10.

Offer Iceland an Alternative to China

The US needs to address China's interest in Iceland as a matter of priority. Sitting astride busy shipping lanes in proximity to the Arctic, Europe and North America, Iceland's geostrategic importance today rivals that of its Cold War stature. In that era, "Iceland was considered one of the most important outposts for U.S. continental defense and for potential offensive military operations against the Soviet Union, in addition to being a vital sea link to Western Europe."²⁸ Save the part about offensive actions against the USSR, Iceland's relevance to American security is no less today than it was during the Cold War. When the United States vacated its facilities at Keflavik in 2006, it opened the door to other states seeking easier access to a regional presence. The geostrategic reality with regard to Iceland is clear: a state seeking bolstered Arctic power will gain options by maintaining a presence in Iceland.

China is courting Iceland enthusiastically.²⁹ Beijing is not the only non-Arctic, non-Western state seeking inroads in Iceland. Several countries seek access to Iceland's strategically valuable position prompting Iceland's president Ólafur Grímsson to state, "they are coming with a basket of investment finance."³⁰ Financial investment is not the only way China is pursuing influence in Iceland. According to Icelandic historian and journalist Hjörtur J. Guðmundsson, "China has for example sent a number of high profile delegations to the country and its embassy in Iceland has reportedly been greatly expanded to include staff up to 500 people. Furthermore, the two countries concluded a landmark free trade deal [in 2013]."³¹ By contrast, the American mission to Iceland

²⁸ Valur Ingimundarson, "Immunizing against the American Other: Racism, Nationalism, and Gender in U.S.-Icelandic Military Relations during the Cold War." *Journal Of Cold War Studies* 6, no. 4 (2004): 70.

²⁹ Hjörtur J. Guðmundsson, "Iceland and the US, old allies, should strengthen their ties," *Alaska Dispatch*, 19 February 2014.

³⁰ Luiza Savage, "Why the World Wants the Arctic" *Maclean's*, May 08, 2013.

³¹ Hjörtur J. Guðmundsson, "Iceland and the US, old allies."

boasts a roster of 12 Americans.³² It is logical to assume that China is not investing in Iceland for love of the island's scenery and culture. Lest Chinese influence secure a stronghold in the North Atlantic – so close to both the European and North American landmasses – Washington must re-insert itself into Icelandic geopolitics. At the very least, Iceland warrants its own American defense attaché. In the current arrangement, the defense attaché office in Norway is responsible for US-Icelandic defense cooperation as an additional duty.³³

NATO and the Arctic

NATO can ill afford to continue operating with its current lack of urgency regarding a proactive Arctic policy. Per Smith-Windsor's NATO research paper, "The safety, security and defence [sic] implications of a warming Arctic are real and cannot be ignored."³⁴ From that knowledge, NATO can take some positive steps toward investing in Arctic security.

First, NATO should reestablish a permanent presence at Keflavik, Iceland. Doing so will serve two primary purposes; it will expedite NATO's ability to respond to any contingency in the Arctic, as well as filling a strategic and diplomatic vacuum that has existed in Iceland since the US vacated Keflavik in 2006.

Second, NATO should strengthen its maritime patrols of the Arctic shipping lanes. In the spirit of the European Union's 2011 document "A sustainable EU policy for the High North," NATO can call on non-alliance states within the EU to share the workload that the EU's document implies. Specifically, the EU's Arctic policy:

Calls on the States in the region to ensure that any current transport routes – and those that may emerge in the future – are open to international shipping and to refrain from

³² Embassy of the United States, Reykjavik, Iceland, http://iceland.usembassy.gov/about_the_embassy.html.

³³ Embassy of the United States, Reykjavik, Iceland.

³⁴ Brooke A. Smith-Windsor, "Putting the 'N' back into NATO: A High North policy framework for the Atlantic Alliance?" 12.

introducing any unilateral arbitrary burdens, be they financial or administrative, that could hinder shipping in the Arctic, other than internationally agreed measures aimed at increasing security or protection of the environment;³⁵

As both Panama and Suez showed, ensuring anything against unilateral actions can be expensive, and will likely require pre-positioned diplomatic and military machinations in order to succeed. If the EU truly wishes for freedom of navigation in the Arctic, NATO can and should help pursue that goal.

Lessons from Panama and Suez

The winner in the Arctic competition will have to draw on past lessons. The winner will set the diplomatic stage like the US did in Panama. Doing so will require money and political will. He will invest in technology and capital projects like France and Great Britain did in Suez, and France and the United States did in Panama. He will have to forge advantageous diplomatic agreements (even when they inconvenience or disadvantage an ally) as the United States did in Panama. He will have to understand the prevailing geostrategic and geopolitical realities in a way Great Britain and Colombia failed to do in Suez and Panama, respectively. Like Nasser demonstrated to his European foes in Suez, “being a... superpower did not always ensure that one got one’s way.”³⁶ Force of arms need not be the *ultima ratio* for a state to win geostrategic gains in the Arctic. Schoenberger and Reich noted “The Soviet-Egyptian rapprochement is generally viewed in the Western literature as a sort of historical accident stemming from the bad timing and bad diplomacy of the Baghdad Pact and Suez crisis.”³⁷ Are historical accidents transpiring today to forge unseen alliances in the Arctic? Is the United States losing

³⁵ European Parliament, “A sustainable EU policy for the High North” section 14. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7-TA-2011-0024&language=EN> accessed May 6, 2014.

³⁶ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 128.

³⁷ Erica Schoenberger and Stephanie Reich, “Soviet Policy in the Middle East,” 12.

ground in the geostrategic game atop the world in 2014 without recognizing it?

While there are no navigable chokepoints in the Arctic today which are administered or controlled by a foreign entity (Canada's Northwest Passage lies within Canadian territory, just as the Russia's Northern Route sits along Russia's littoral), America's experience in the Panama Canal offers valuable lessons. Foremost, American diplomats of the 19th century identified a potential means of magnifying American power by investing in the Panama Canal. First by securing access rights on the ground in Central America, and second by completing the engineering project and providing unblinking defense of the canal and Canal Zone, American diplomatic and military power prevented foreign attack on the canal during two world wars. A significant achievement, American interests expanded and benefitted by the sustained American presence in the Canal Zone until America's departure in the late 20th century. Although no state can undertake a similar engineering project to create access in the Arctic the way America did in Panama, they can benefit by exerting national efforts to secure safe access to Arctic sea lanes.

When the US and Great Britain agreed on their shared roles and interests in the Panama Canal, they decided to pursue peaceful diplomatic discourse.³⁸ Although such interaction between the two powers might seem expected today, the world's diplomatic character was very different in the 19th century. Great Britain was still the world's dominant power on the seas and America was just emerging as a global player, both militarily and economically. With the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, the United States scored an outsized victory without resting on military might. Regarding American interests in the Panama Canal, A.T. Mahan observed that even with America's "undeniable advantage" in geopolitical terms, an "inferiority of organized brute-force, which remains

³⁸ Mario Rodriguez, "The 'Prometheus' and the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty," 260.

the last argument of republics [and] kings” would vitiate that advantage.³⁹ Mahan gave short shrift to the strength of diplomatic maneuvering. America’s diplomatic coup in essentially monopolizing the Panama Canal Zone was noteworthy in that the threat of force was not the primary motivator to secure America’s interests. America’s diplomatic prowess in the Panama Canal should serve as a model for how to maneuver at the negotiating table for freedom of access in a changing modern Arctic environment.

In today’s Arctic, no one needs to invest any capital in building a new sea line of communication. Melting ice is accomplishing that feat. En route support facilities and enhanced ports along developing sea routes will grow as long as enterprising companies and individuals believe there is the promise of profit. Building modern day icebreaker ships is a weak analogy to the type of national energy that went into building the canal in the 19th and 20th centuries. While icebreakers are expensive, they pale in comparison to the prioritization France and the United States put on the Panama Canal project. For the United States, prestige and security were primary driving forces when American statesmen chose to lay the legal groundwork, finish building, and then subsequently administer the canal. That commitment by Washington is analogous to what should happen in the Arctic today. For Canada, it would mean establishing a robust presence along the land corridors of the Northwest Passage. Only by “being there” can Canada ensure its territorial waterway does not fall victim to abuse. For the United States, a similar formula of being present in the Arctic would protect American interests. Although the risk of a foreign interloper invading and occupying American or Canadian arctic territory is remote, without a sustained presence in the frozen reaches of the north, the US and Canada risk ceding sovereignty to anyone willing to challenge it.

³⁹ Captain A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, 326.

Bullets need not fly for an Arctic rebalance of power to occur. If a powerful party decided to change the status quo in the Arctic, it would need only look to the Panama Canal to see a winning formula for fomenting regional change. In contrast, Suez showed how having a preponderance of military might does not guarantee that a powerful state can have its way. Lest they risk ending up like Colombia, which lost part of what it considered to be its sovereign territory in the Panamanian revolution, or Great Britain who fought a winning war toward a losing end, the US, Canada, and NATO need to turn a resolute eye northward.

Russia and China

The purpose of this section thus far has been to advocate for increased vigor relating to American and Canadian Arctic policy. Since Russia and China are the other powerful states operating in the region, they deserve treatment here as well. However, this section will not offer suggestions for what Moscow and Beijing should do in the Arctic. Nor will it engage in “what-if” scenarios. Instead, I recommend that America’s policymakers examine the motivations that might inform Russian and Chinese actions in the Arctic.

In the immediate lead up to the Suez War, British “policy-makers were angered and anguished by the haemorrhage of power” they had been enduring since the end of WWII. The mood was apocalyptic, not adventurous.”⁴⁰ The analogy of post-WWII Great Britain and post-Soviet Russia is not a tenuous one. There is a compelling case for seeing London’s actions in 1956 and Moscow’s modern actions in Chechnya and Ukraine through the lens of prospect theory.⁴¹ Daniel Kahneman showed that the pain of losses exceeds the pleasure of gains.⁴² Great Britain and Russia sought to prevent the pain of losing the Suez Canal

⁴⁰ Anthony Adamthwaite, “Suez Revisited,” 463.

⁴¹ Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2011), 280.

⁴² Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 339.

and territory in the Caucasuses, respectively, and so engaged in risky behavior.

It is important that any calculation of contemporary Russian and Chinese Arctic policies consider the perceived losses those states might face by failing to secure their desired ends. It behooves American strategists to ascertain Moscow's and Beijing's reference points with regard to their Arctic ambitions.⁴³ Failure to do so could prove costly and if done properly, will facilitate cooperation and conflict avoidance.

Cooperate for Peace, Prepare for War

Have the courage to plant acorns before you need oak trees.
-Meg Whitman

Moltke observed military history as “the most expensive means of teaching war during peace.”⁴⁴ Military strategists capitalize on the expensive lessons of the past. Alexander the Great learned from his father “that military force was not the sole weapon, nor the most puissant, in strategy.”⁴⁵ Today's strategists should take his lesson to heart. Contemporary world events reflect Thucydides' recounting of the Melian Dialogue, reminding the reader that “the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept.”⁴⁶ Regardless of the advances in internationalism and cooperation, it is clear even in 2014 that “Money and hard power count, and that's that. The big players have it, and the smaller players play along.”⁴⁷ So long as the strong states have the power to benefit in the Arctic by going with the flow, they will. When Russia, China, Canada, and the US no longer see cooperation in their best interests, they will change their ways. Strong and weak states alike owe their people a good faith effort to do what they

⁴³ Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 281.

⁴⁴ David J. Lonsdale, *The Nature of War in the Information Age*, 20.

⁴⁵ David J. Lonsdale, *The Nature of War in the Information Age*, 42.

⁴⁶ Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 402.

⁴⁷ Neil Macdonald, “The Ukraine crisis through the whimsy of international law,” *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*, 5 March 2014.

can in their peoples' best interests. In the Arctic, that means cooperating diplomatically and economically when possible, and defending by means of force when necessary. One key to being ready to meet the challenges that occur when the switch occurs is having the audacity to lead turn policy changes before events force them.

If conflict is inevitable, national leaders must properly choose and equip their military leaders. Without a clearly defined and achievable end, along with the proper buy-in from allies, any war over a strategic chokepoint risks repeating the mistakes of the Suez Crisis. British elites internalized that lesson when preparing for the Falklands War. Then-Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's cabinet sought to avoid repeating the errors of Suez 26 years earlier. One advisor described the Suez fiasco as being run "in a hurried reactive almost furtive way...[which]...seemed to...typify the dangers of trying to run something as if it were private laundry and not, as we then were, a major country on the world stage engaged in a singularly difficult adventure."⁴⁸ Great Britain's experience in their Suez fiasco contrasts with America's experience in Panama, whereby generations of leaders set the stage for eventual exploitation of the geostrategic environment when opportunity arose. American leaders must understand that we are on the world stage in the Arctic and must plan accordingly. Whether other states seek cooperation or competition in the Arctic, America must be ready to go with the flow, or have the courage to create its own.

⁴⁸ Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Longman, 1999), 269.

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